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SPECIAL EDITION

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Minority Achievement • Math Anxiety
Teacher Certification • Student Failure
Parents and Schools • Career Ladders
Magnet Schools • Accountability

ISSUES '88

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Welcome to *Issues '88*, the new special annual edition of *NEA Today*.

In the pages that follow, you'll find in-depth articles by some of the sharpest cutting-edge thinkers—and doers—in American education today.

Some of these articles may express ideas and insights you've wanted to see in print ever since you began teaching. Other articles may challenge the assumptions you hold dearest. Still others may strike you as just plain wrong.

And that's fine. To move education forward, we need discussion and debate. We need the clarity that comes from the clash of ideas. We need the opportunity to explore new directions, to float trial balloons, to risk new approaches.

Turn the page and you'll read about issues—literacy, accountability, evaluation, testing, and many, many more—that don't lend themselves to easy consensus. But we need to forge that consensus nonetheless because these are all issues that matter to us and the students we teach.

The articles in *Issues '88* define problems, provide perspective, offer solutions, suggest further reading. That's all any articles can do. The action that makes a difference for our schools—and for our nation—is up to all of us in NEA.

Bill Fischer
Editor

ISSUES '88

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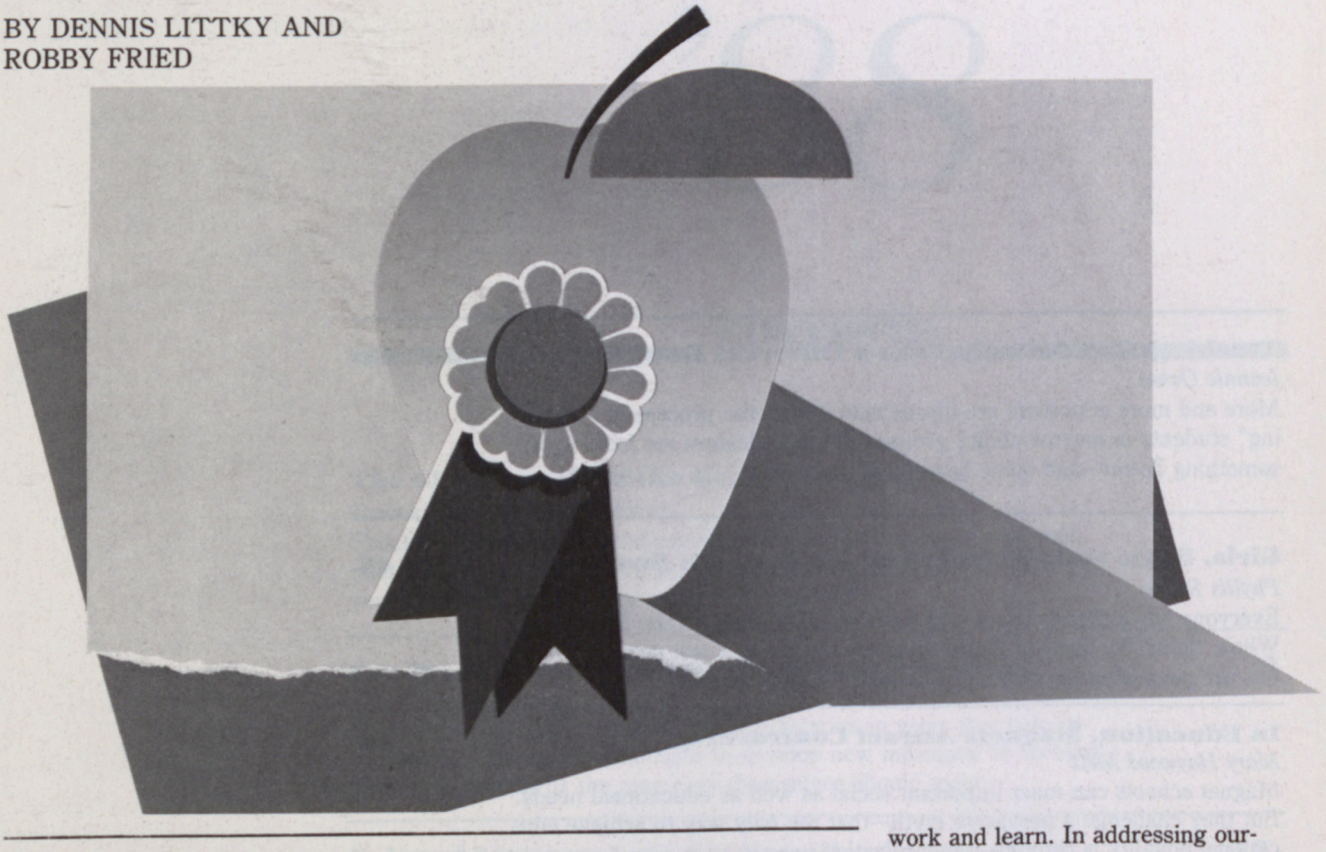
The Challenge To Make Good Schools Great

BY DENNIS LITTKY AND ROBBY FRIED



Should schools change—and can they? What can teachers do to push, pull, and haul a good school across the line into greatness? Who are your allies and who are the enemies of change?

Dennis Littky, the principal of the 350-student Thayer High School in rural Winchester, N.H., began his public school career in the '60s in New York. Littky and coauthor Robby Fried, a former principal and currently an educational consultant, have been involved with the Coalition of Essential Schools begun by noted reformer Theodore Sizer. Both were fired by their local school boards but survived to continue making change.

Changing schools—helping ordinary schools become, hopefully, great schools—is what we do for a living. It's not an easy job. And we have no illusions that American schools—primary or secondary, public or private—are waiting eagerly for change to happen.

For one thing, it's not easy for schoolfolk, particularly teachers, to put themselves into the front ranks of those who want to dramatically improve schools. Teachers are hired to teach kids, not as "change agents."

We offer you no sure-fire models, no risk-free schemes for making schools significantly better places to work and learn. In addressing ourselves to the complex issue of school reform, we hope in this article to lead you from one question: "Why should schools change?" to a second question: "What does it take to make change happen?" and, finally, to a third: "Is this for me?"

All this talk about "change" and "reform," about "excellence" or "effectiveness" can seem awfully remote, far from the reality of the classroom where students and teachers are thrown together each day to try and get some learning done.

The kinds of change most of us know—quiet, small-scale changes—go on all the time, but rarely get noticed outside our own classroom. Every day, in almost every classroom, a teacher and students are trying to do things a little differently, a little better, but it doesn't seem to add up. The small victories of the moment tend to unravel as one class is replaced by the next and our students go on to a different

set of rules, procedures, expectations.

Maybe that's the best we can hope for. Maybe the situation is basically okay, and we'd be foolish to look for "big changes." Shouldn't we be content that so many teachers are dedicated to slowly but consistently improving the content or delivery of their lessons? Why not let well enough alone?

Why Change the Schools?

The trouble is that every day we hear good teachers—not necessarily the "superstars," just good, competent, caring teachers—tell us they're fed up with how little real learning goes on. There's lots of busywork and precious little of the kind of learning that's important for its own sake—the kind that helps young people think better, act more thoughtfully, choose more wisely.

We all want more active engagement from students. We know an excited, engaged classroom when we see it: kids fired up to learn, eager to use their minds to challenge, to question, to probe and discover; kids working as hard as they can and looking proud of what they've accomplished.

We've all seen such an attitude, in snatches: at a science fair, a school play, a football game with marching band, a math team contest, a debating match—and in the classroom, in those moments when the kids get suddenly unshy about speaking their minds on an issue that touches them.

In Erica Ryll's eighth grade home economics class, the students began reading about plans for a multi-town dump to be placed in their village. The kids went out to investigate, interviewed residents and town officials, took photographs that revealed an aquifer where planners had found none, and got themselves appointed to several of the town committees working on the project. These kids are "fired up," their teacher reports. "They're mad—they think their town is being dumped on and they're working to prevent it."

During those episodes when we're teaching at our best, when students are truly engaged, we know that "good enough" education just isn't. One can argue that since much of life is tedious and dull there's nothing wrong with school being that way most of the time—or one can get angry because students are being cheated out of their right to be actively, thoughtfully engaged.

The critics of American schooling find our schools needlessly boring. They claim that most teachers talk too much, while students remain passive; that many kids pass through elementary school without gaining a strong foundation in "the basics," and that many of those who graduate high school lack the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will be needed in the 21st century. They say it doesn't have to be that way, and many teachers and principals agree.

Every day good, competent, caring teachers tell us they're fed up with how little real learning goes on.

Let's consider school change of a substantial nature—what's called "turning a school around"—getting students to really shape up, raising teacher morale and effectiveness, making test scores soar or dropout rates plummet.

The process of real change begins with the leadership of one or more people who have a deeply-felt vision—call it a passionate vision—of a great future for their school; people who can raise their eyes high enough above the daily smog to see that ordinary kids can do wonderful things if the conditions are right; people who believe that having a great day at school is a lot less exhausting than having a lousy day; people with a faith that hard work directed at worthwhile goals can produce amazing results.

Such a vision seems to us essential—if insufficient—in making a great school. Those of us who work hard day by day without the fire of school reform burning in our bellies require a vision—a convincing picture—to lure us out of our inertia, to help break us out of our isolation. There is power in a dream of excellence, so long as some among us believe in it with our hearts. Such a vision—even if held, at first, by only a few—offers the rest of us an enhanced view of our own lives. It raises (in a phrase we love to bestow on kids) our "self-esteem." And teachers need that kind of raise as much as any other. Our careers in education come to "mean something" beyond the valid but limited satisfaction we get from knowing that we've helped a few individual students improve their lot in life.

Good leadership—by one person or a group—doesn't have to be noisy or self-enhancing. And it doesn't have to be imported. Leadership can develop among ordinary schoolfolk through a quiet but shared vision of excellence and a faith that we can do a lot better with what we've got to work with than we've done in the past.

Such a vision ups the ante; it raises the emotional tenor of our daily lives. It helps us see our labors and frustrations in a larger, unifying context. It makes us feel less alone, less put-upon, less vulnerable to nagging self-criticism or the cynicism of others.

But "visions" and "visionaries" can be dangerous. In the hands of a demagogue or a manipulator, a dream can lead to disillusion and chaos. Leaders who can't be self-critical, who don't laugh at themselves from time to time, who refuse to take seriously other people's pain or doubt, who won't acknowledge opposition, or who substitute mushy slogans for hard thinking and careful planning should be avoided like the Ayatollah.

Ingredients of Change

So "vision," alone, isn't enough. It must be tempered by the habit of thinking clearly and critically and systematically about how change comes about. We might begin by ridding ourselves of the fatal illusion that because we're "good people" who seek to improve our school, barriers to change will crumble and everyone will flock to our cause. Better to assume that we're quite ignorant about "the system" we work in, that we're politically naive and need to get smarter fast. We must learn how to do business with people—all kinds of people.

Being strategic means knowing how

and when to act. Strategic wisdom comes in knowing what to do, and what to avoid doing.

The wisdom begins with the ability to see the "big picture" in specific terms, to agree on what our school would look like if the changes we have in mind were starting to take hold: do numbers of our students seem to be "lost in the crowd"? Do they need to feel like they're part of a family? Then let's talk about recruiting every adult in school to be an academic adviser to a small group of students—making sure each kid is known and cared about by *somebody*.

Finding advocates for your vision within the school—among secretaries, cooks, and custodians as well as department heads—is an important piece of strategic wisdom. So is knowing how to avoid making enemies. Change efforts are easily derailed by premature, flippant trumpeting of the righteousness of one's cause. A single newspaper story or letter to parents that describes your group as "striving to overcome years of mediocre education" will make veteran teachers feel as if they've been kicked in the teeth. They'll hate you for it—and they know more about survival than you do.

Seek friends out in the community, too: parents who want their kids to be life-long learners; businesspeople who hire your graduates; the shopkeepers and the independent craftspeople who live by their wits and their hard work—they'll support anything you do that helps kids become self-respecting, enterprising problem-solvers.

Strategic wisdom also means being able to plan well for both the short- and the long-term, tackling those problems that can be solved easily—like making the school building look better, or helping a colleague solve a small but nagging problem—so as to build credibility for future, more difficult changes.

Learn how to be lucky—keep your door open to good fortune—and be ready to turn any looming disaster into success. For example, when a high school student working as an apprentice in a local beauty parlor became pregnant, she was told she could no longer work there because customers might object. The young woman was ready to drop out of school. But nonjudgmental counseling and personal support from her academic adviser and apprentice director convinced her to stay and learn—to conduct a community survey on attitudes towards pregnant teens. The girl regained her self-respect and stayed on to become class president and honor roll student for the first time—and a proud and caring mother.

Call it "strategic wisdom," call it common sense or horse sense—it's the ability to size up the situation, create options where nobody thought they existed, and get the best out of people by respecting them, their gifts, their problems.

And it still may not be enough to turn a school around. You and your colleagues need the added blessing of a spirit of enthusiasm, a zest and spontaneity that bubble over and infuse those around you with a sense of the possible—that helps them make connections.

Change begins with the leadership of people who have a deeply felt vision—call it a passionate vision—of a great future for their school.

Those connections can be very specific and concrete. A high school health class began to mean something to students when they discovered neglected elderly folks in a nearby nursing home. To visit them, the students had either to wade through a swamp or to waste time going by a roundabout route. A science class agreed to study the swamp to determine how human traffic would affect its ecology. A wood shop class was asked to design a bridge and boardwalk. Connections! Intellectual, ecological, physical, and social connections. Classrooms talking to one another—a great school needs great connections!

Combining a deeply felt vision with strategic wisdom and great gobs of energy and enthusiasm may not guarantee success in the perilous business of school reform, but it's as close as we can come to defining the challenge for those who want to turn their school around. Obviously, as the situation, problems, and personalities of individual schools vary, so will the particular "vision" and the "strategic wisdom" necessary to realize progress. But schoolwide change will never come from smugness or from slogans. It can't be imposed from on high, and it often requires people to take significant risks in their professional lives.

Does all this sound familiar? So why doesn't it work? Why don't schools change? The obvious answer must be that teachers and administrators in a school will probably never agree among themselves on what kinds of changes to bring about. We settle for fine-tuning our own lessons because trying to get schoolwide consensus on any major change seems an exhausting, if not hopeless, task.

Such tinkering is enough, however, only if our goal is merely to make what we already do more "interesting." If we really want kids to learn how to think for themselves, if we want to develop not only children's minds but their character and their self-esteem as worthwhile, caring individuals, we'd better not be stopped by the claim that change can't happen because educators won't agree upon what should be done.

Is Consensus Possible?

We challenge those of you who believe that no consensus for change is possible in your school to consider the following half-dozen propositions—two each for students, teachers, and administrators:

Students should learn to think more independently and more critically, to eagerly explore the world of ideas, and to actively engage in issues of substance. It shouldn't be such a chore to get them "turned on" to using their minds.

Students should show a greater sense of responsibility to themselves, to one another, to the school and community, in their attitudes towards learning and their personal behavior. They should care, and show they care.

Teachers should communicate better

among themselves, so that they can reinforce one another's efforts and develop common standards and expectations for student performance.

Teachers should work towards improving the curriculum and climate of the school as a whole, not only of their own class or department.

Principals and other building administrators should spend most of their time improving the academic performance of students, instead of getting lost in bureaucratic busywork.

Principals and other administrators should work to create a positive, cooperative, and stimulating emotional climate within the school, helping to resolve tensions and conflicts and enhance "school spirit."

We think that we're on common ground with this list, that educators would welcome most if not all such changes. We're convinced these six ideas would have a major positive effect on our schools. So what's holding us back? Let's get going: form a committee; schedule meetings; prepare a game plan; write a grant proposal; run the whole scheme past the superintendent, the teacher's union, and the school board. And you're on your way. . . .

You're on your way—if past experience is any guide—on a journey of frustration, through a course of confusion and a minefield of bureaucratic obstacles, to a destination that loses itself in a fog. You'll end up uncertain where things went astray and why good folks have gradually lost faith. And you'll be damned if you're going to get burned twice. Next time somebody comes up with a big plan for schoolwide change, you'll tell him or her where to go with it.

What Happens to Change?

It's true that enthusiastic amateurs in the political process of changing schools sometimes get their heads handed to them. It's even more likely that advocates for change will be patronized—thanked for their earnest efforts on behalf of better education and sent back to the classroom where they belong. But determined, idealistic, hard-thinking political amateurs win a few struggles as well.

It's crucial to know who the enemies of change are. We've met them all: the principal who stifles creativity with a warning about that "noisy classroom"; the parent who threatens lawsuits instead of discussing the problem; the union rep who scorns excellence as a threat to collective security; the local politician who vetoes anything he didn't have when he was in school. Everybody's got their list of bad guys. Here's our dirty dozen:

Enthusiastic amateurs in the political process of changing schools sometimes get their heads handed to them.

1. *Champions of inertia,* who sanctify the traditional school structure ("It must be right because it's always been that way").

2. *Sanctimonious state mandates,* the "if what we've got ain't working, let's demand more of it" brand of state legislative requirements.

3. *Prophets of self-protection,* so concerned with maintaining their positions that they subvert all opportunities for change. As one teacher complained: "We're always digging trenches when we should be climbing mountains!"

4. *Glad-handing administrators,* who pretend to support school reform while working behind the scenes to undermine it.

5. *Teacher's room tyrants,* the naysayers and cynics who hold forth daily amid coffee cups and ashtrays, providing administrative cynics with all the proof they need that teachers can't be trusted to work together to improve schools.

6. *Miserly school boards,* which blame teachers for poor student performance and then cut budgets for professional development. Take a million-dollar enterprise and spend a mere 1 percent of its budget on research for product improvement—that's "staff development" in most schools.

7. *People who resent teenagers,* all too common in our nation that worships "youth" but is afraid of young people—their energy, their self-centeredness, their sexuality. Some folk see school as a "holding tank" for kids and rail against "giving those kids a lot of privileges they don't deserve."

8. *Technical prima donnas,* the central office specialists who feel it's their business to impose materials and procedures upon teachers and who oppose school-based initiatives for school improvement.

9. *Panacea peddlers,* purveyors of "teacher-proof" textbooks, sellers of slick and simplistic "plug-in models" for controlling students or "packaging" curriculum.

10. *Test-score junkies,* who advocate teaching to the test and devalue learning that can't be measured on standardized tests.

11. *Programmatic power-mongers,* the department heads or program chiefs who exclude everyone but themselves from all decision-making responsibility.

12. *Managerial myopics,* who refuse to hire administrators or teachers with other than traditional educational backgrounds and thus deprive schools of new talent and new perspectives.

And we wonder why it's hard to change schools! Hopefully, you and those who share your vision of a great school will not have to face all of these obstructionists at once, but they are certainly out there. Resistance—subtle or brutish—is the name of their game. They don't need to "do" anything, after all, to triumph. If nothing happens, they've won!

So what's it going to be? Is this list of opponents enough to scare you out of the struggle? Does the enormity of the task make retreating to your classroom or department to tinker with your lesson plans look like a much safer course to follow?

Or does it make your blood boil that our professional lives and the futures of our students are held hostage to a school structure, climate, and curriculum that fall far short of what they might be, even given the perpetually underfunded condition of the educational system?

Taking Up the Challenge

What is your vision? Who around you shares it? (Indeed, have you shared yours with others?) How would you wish yourself and your colleagues and your students to spend the time in school? Amid all the things that people in a school are "supposed" to do, what are those that are truly essential? What would you gladly do less of in order to spend time and energy where it counts?

If you are willing to proceed despite the obstacles, we offer the following concepts to sustain you in your labors.

1. *Concentration.* Figure out what you stand for and try to make it a part of everything you do in school. Put your philosophy up on the wall, if that's what it takes to keep it in focus. Explain to your students why you're dissatisfied with "business as usual." Otherwise you'll be pulled apart by the conflicting demands and multiple distractions of every school day.

2. *Commitment.* Change doesn't happen easily or quickly. Educational fads and slogans come and go; people stay. Commitment to serious school change means commitment to *being there.* If the dreams are the right ones, they're worth holding onto.

3. *Communication.* Talk about jargon! How did such good things as "telling the truth," "reasoned argument," "open-minded listening," "honest disagreement," and "warmly shared enthusiasm" ever get swallowed up by the term "communication"? Frequent, forthright, and humane conversation is the lifeblood of school reform.

Does it make your blood boil that our professional lives and the futures of our students are held hostage?

4. *Collaboration.* Schools are bastions of isolation. Teachers work separated from colleagues; students often feel alone in a crowded classroom. Rarely do students and teachers experience true teamwork, shared enterprise. A competitive world demands that students develop collaborative skills, and schools must help people work towards colleagueship.

5. *Caring.* What a school is depends more on how people treat each other than on anything else. No slogan, no software, no shortcut can conjure up this most basic of values. That old adage "relationship first, task second" applies equally to a class or a committee.

6. *Conviviality.* It's all very well to articulate a philosophy of school reform and pursue it in a focused and committed way. But somebody's got to buy the pizzas, bring in the birthday balloons, spice up faculty meetings with fancy pastry and lousy jokes. Conviviality—that's the quality of acceptance, of geniality and good-naturedness, creating a culture where people are known and valued for who they are, not just the work they do.

We suggest that you who have a vision of how your school might become a great school should have conversation. First within yourselves—an internal dialogue—to center on what's truly important about being an educator. Then with those around you whom you trust, to begin to build a collective vision. Expand the circle, invite colleagues, parents, community residents to share the conversation and the conviviality. Talk with us, we'd love to hear how your plans are progressing.

When should all this begin to happen? The great humanitarian, Albert Schweitzer, put it best: "As for the right time to act, the time, inevitably, is now. It can only be now. Truth has no special time of its own. When circumstances seem least propitious, that is the correct time."

For Further Reading

Doc, A Story About Dennis Littky and the Transition at Thayer High (tentative title). Susan Campbell. Contemporary Books, tentative publication date: Fall 1988.

Experience and Education. John Dewey. Collier Books, 1963.

Dewey's most concise statement about the needs, problems, and possibilities of education should be reread every year.

Horace's Compromise, the Dilemma of the American High School. Revised edition. Theodore R. Sizer. Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

This is the best of recent critiques on high schools. It advocates major reforms and includes clear-cut suggestions for needed changes. Sizer, now on the Brown University faculty, has built a Coalition of Essential Schools that share a common, nine-point philosophy.

Schooling in America, Scapegoat and Salvation. Seymour Sarason. Free Press, 1983.

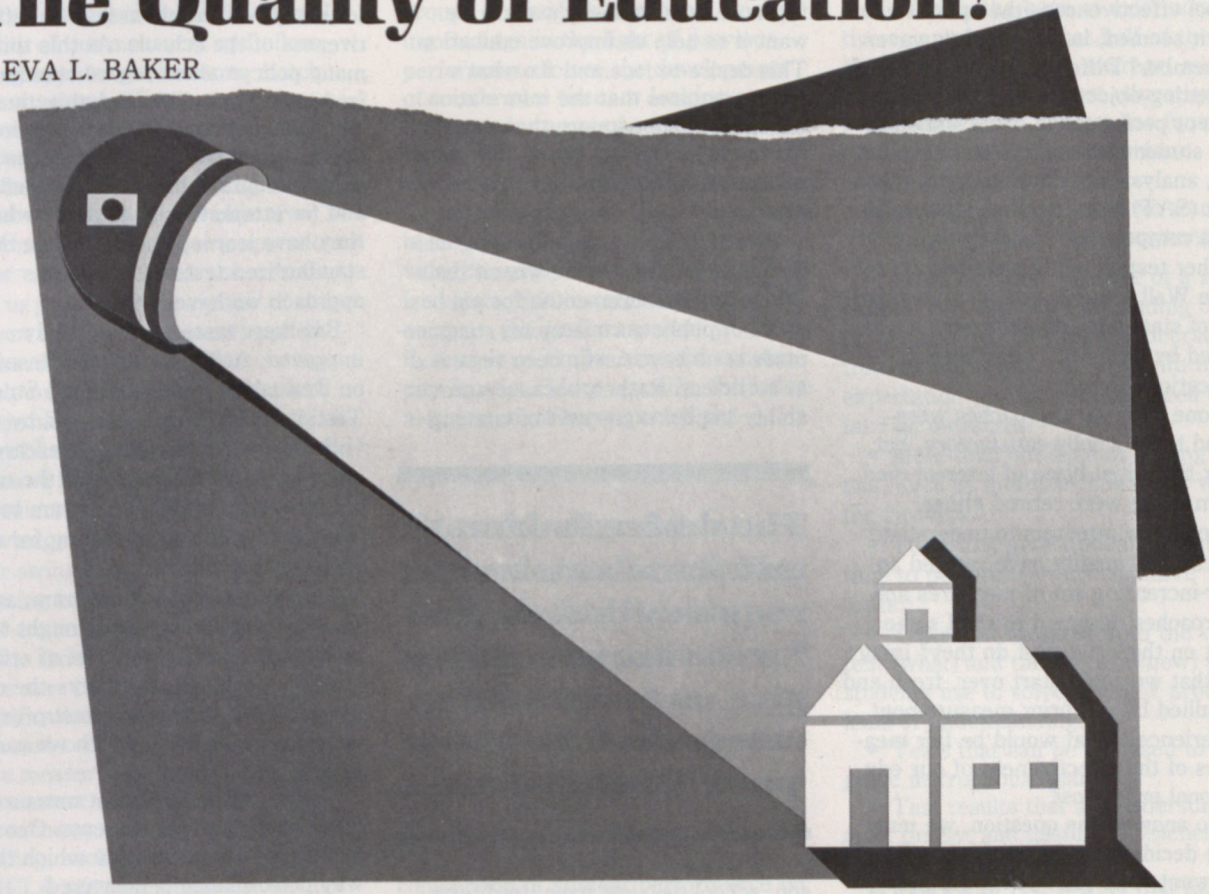
This historical look at schools explains why they have changed again and again, yet still remain the same.

Successful Schools for Young Adolescents. Joan Lipsitz. Transaction Books, 1983.

A close look at four middle schools which, although indivdual in character, share common attributes of a joyful atmosphere and a sense of community.

Can We Fairly Measure The Quality of Education?

BY EVA L. BAKER



How can we measure effectiveness in education in ways that help us increase it? The time seems right to develop new measures of accountability and standards the measures themselves should meet.

For the past 12 years, Eva Baker has directed the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation. Her early UCLA work focused on teacher training and teacher assessment of written composition, technology, and educational policy. Baker has served as president of the Educational Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association and as a national officer of the American Educational Research Association.

American political attention has turned with increasing intensity to the matter of educational quality. From the reports of commissions and panels to debates by presidential candidates, the focus on students, teachers, and schools grows sharper every day. At the center of concern is a deceptively simple question: How well do our schools prepare our students?

Whether the language emphasizes excellence, subject matter understanding, productivity, or competitiveness, the meaning of the debate is clear: Can we describe, judge, and improve the effectiveness of public schools?

Over the years, significant investments have been made in trying to answer these questions. Standardized achievement tests, educational program evaluations, teacher testing, and minimum competency tests for students are all thought to provide useful information to help make judgments about the effects of educational services on students.

Many of these options have roots in the mid-1960s enactment of federal legislation to assist educationally disadvantaged students. This new legislation required that the federal government evaluate the effects of its efforts to provide compensatory resources for students. The legislation was directly responsible for the rapid development and growth of the evaluation field and for many scientific developments in the measurement of human performance.

Through the ensuing decades, one or another particular version of evaluation or measurement was selected as the new solution for understanding school effectiveness—the options coming, it seemed, in overlapping waves. Remember? Different solutions included setting objectives and measuring student performance, local standardized student testing, program evaluation, analysis of Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score decline, state minimum competency examinations, teacher testing, state assessment, and "The Wall Chart," a national comparison of state educational systems promoted by the U.S. Department of Education.

None of these approaches were found to be wholly satisfactory, but, after the initial blaze of interest died down, none were retired either. Instead, our attempts to understand educational quality have created an ever-increasing set of measures and approaches designed to shed some light on the issue. But do they? Imagine that we could start over, fresh and unsullied by our prior measurement experience. What would be fair measures of the effectiveness of our educational programs?

To answer this question, we must first decide what level of information we want. The public seems equally interested in the concrete accomplishments of local schools and the general descriptions of the educational system at large. Making a judgment about all of American education and assessing the effectiveness of First Street School in your hometown, however, require different levels of information. When taking a nationwide view, we look for common features of schools and curriculums on which to base our judgment. When looking at a particular school, we can be much more attentive to the community characteristics, the kinds of students attending the school, the particular goals of the school, and other special conditions. In both cases, we simply want to know the following:

What are the students learning?
How well do the teachers teach?
What is the quality of our schools?

The answers to these questions should not simply describe the state of performance for students, teachers, and school administrators, but should permit us to devise actions to make things better. We want information for more than curiosity's sake; we want it to help us improve education. This desire to face and fix what's wrong requires that the information we collect give us more than categorical "good" or "poor" labels. We need enough detail to guide our policies and practices.

Traditionally, student learning has been measured by achievement tests. When the measurement is for purposes of public accountability, teacher-made tests have never been regarded as sufficient. Rather, because accountability implies some sort of comparison, school districts have used tests that have standard content and rather general applicability. After two decades of concerns about standardized testing, a few issues remain salient:

The desire to face and fix what's wrong requires that the information we collect give us more than categorical 'good' or 'poor' labels.

- Standardized tests allow comparisons among schools and regions. They may, however, be somewhat insensitive to curricular and instructional variations. Because they are designed to be of widest utility, standardized tests may omit areas of particular emphasis for particular schools. Further, they provide information on only a narrow slice of school activities.
- Standardized tests most often ask children to answer questions given in a multiple-choice format. I believe this format greatly underestimates student performance.
- For technical reasons of test design, very small absolute differences (for instance, one more test item correct) might mean an improvement of a grade level or so. Inferences about educational quality based on such differences are shaky at best.

Test performance still is, in that unfortunate phrase, the "bottom line" for many who would assess the effectiveness of the schools. At this time, many policymakers regard standardized tests as credible and objective. Achievement testing will not go away, and for good reason. Schools must be held accountable for teaching students and for attempting to measure what they have learned. Many people think standardized tests are the best approach we have.

But these tests can be greatly improved. At the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), sponsored by the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, we are in the midst of a five-year research program to improve the quality of testing for use in the schools.

The precepts of our program, and the way we believe testing ought to be improved, fix on a small set of critical issues, all related to validity—the quality of the information the test provides us and the degree to which we can believe it.

Validity of achievement measures has a number of components. One that is critical is the degree to which the way performance is measured matches the mode in which learning best occurs. With the advances in cognitive science, we believe we can design measures that more productively represent the richness of learning. For example, we're interested in assuring that in mathematics, science, and history, students be given different ways to demonstrate their competence, perhaps in multiple-choice tests, perhaps in other paper-and-pencil formats, perhaps using computer dynamic displays, perhaps in writing.

Student Learning

Many testing formats in current use developed because they were convenient to administer and score rather than because they were the best ways to assess complex human understanding. Standardized tests often force students to give the first, quick response, rather than a thoughtful, reasoned answer. The balance between conserv-

ing the time spent on testing and providing enough opportunity for adequate thought is still unsettled. Perhaps a more diverse menu of testing approaches will increase the overall validity of our measures and allow testing approaches better to match student propensities.

A second validity concern relates to the content or subject matter of what is to be tested. One of the sadder outcomes of the behavioral objective movement and the inquiry approaches of the early 1970's was the attention paid to process *at the expense* of the content to which a process applied. We have seen the pendulum swing widely on this issue during the last two decades. Given the popularity of books like E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* and the scandalous blanks and misunderstandings in our students' knowledge, we are on the verge of another swing towards content. Thus it's tempting to devise tests that can pinpoint content errors.

This time, however, we want to make sure that we go well beyond identification or recognition of specific facts and concepts. We intend to integrate measurement approaches that wed content with sophisticated approaches to demonstrating understanding, such as complex essays. We at UCLA are developing the technology to score such essays reliably and relatively inexpensively.

Third, we are interested in measures that can be related directly to instructional options. We should be measuring performance that schools can affect. This means that, where possible, we should be collecting information about teaching practices, student familiarity with content, and so on, at the same time that we measure student performance.

Fourth, our measures must be valid when individual and group differences are considered. Whether a test is fair is a psychological as well as an empirical issue. We particularly want to ensure that our measures validly assess strengths and weaknesses of our pluralistic student body in a way that contributes to their motivation to continue learning.

Even when student achievement is measured validly, the way the findings are interpreted makes a difference. Interpretation involves relating findings to those yielded by similar measures of performance, comparing findings to the performance of similar groups of students or schools, analyzing findings in the light of previous performance to see the development of trends over time, or looking at performance in terms of some predetermined standard. Comparison to other student groups is the most common interpretation strategy. This comparison is the basis of "norms"—averages provided for many nationally standardized tests. Some state assessments compare the performance of students in schools of similar size and community location. More recently, the federal government has reported the comparison of student performance on the SAT state by state, a specific approach to be discussed later.

Standardized tests often force students to give the first, quick response rather than thoughtful, reasoned answers.

A central issue of interpretation is what is being compared. Are tests of individual students used to make comparisons among schools? What other information needs to be collected if such use of information is to be sensible?

The first question for these sorts of comparisons is: Is the comparison fair? One shouldn't compare a small, stable suburban school with a central city school that has a high mobility rate. Given the increasing diversity of our students, comparisons now must take into account factors such as language in the home and length of time in the school in addition to the more usual socioeconomic measures.

Another option has been international comparison. While this might be useful in setting goals for our students, the inference persists that we should adopt practices embedded in other cultures or in other, more centralized arrangements for educational policymaking. Such an inference is probably unwarranted.

Moreover, the bane of most normative comparisons is that half of the group is always below average, a status unacceptable to most educational policymakers. No one yet has figured out how all students can perform "above the average."

To sum up, what should we want in student achievement measurement?

- More than one measure of a single phenomenon, such as reading comprehension, to allow for corroboration from different sources—but with no expectation that all students need to take all measures.
- More than one kind of testing format, such as multiple-choice and written answers.
- Tests that give students adequate time to perform serious cognitive tasks.
- Tests that measure both the content (what) and the process (how) that students use to solve complex problems of understanding.
- Tests that can be analyzed to guide instructional planning.
- Test results that are understandable, timely, and useful for teachers in instruction and planning.
- Reports of test results that are fair to students, teachers, and schools.

Quality of Teaching

A second enduring concern in education is the quality of teaching. This interest is obvious; when we think of schools we think of teachers. Given the instructional and economic dominance of teachers in schooling, it's natural to want to judge the effectiveness of educational investments in part by looking at teaching. The problems begin when one tries actually to measure the quality of teaching and confuses the measure with the "quality" of teachers.

Just as in assessing student achievement, the principal trouble spot in measuring quality of teaching is validity. There is little real agreement on what good teaching is. When good results occur, we can attempt to infer which teaching practices were responsible. Principles such as providing students with opportunity to learn, clear

task directions, and feedback, undoubtedly apply—on the average. Our problem is that we are often interested not in teaching on the average, but in a particular teacher's competency, perhaps to determine eligibility for merit pay or other forms of advancement. When the individual teacher is our focus, we must take special care to allow for differences in pedagogical style, since for various topics, objectives, grade levels, personalities, settings, and student groups, no "best" pedagogical approach has been identified.

The Carnegie Foundation is supporting development of new approaches to the assessment of teaching competencies. Although designed to permit special certification of teachers rather than assess educational effects, this effort may have some positive influence on the measurement of teaching capability.

Because teaching quality itself has been hard to measure, many have supported the measurement, instead, of prerequisites that good teachers are presumed to need. Such prerequisites include mastery of subject matter; mastery of basic knowledge about teaching, student development, and learning; and mastery of basic skills. Tests—some with associated sanctions—have been devised to assess teachers in many of these areas.

Although the right of the state or school district to set standards of this sort is not in dispute, conflicts have developed on a number of points. In a 1987 paper written for the Office for Educational Research and Improvement, L. M. Rudner and associates point out that the standards for many of these tests have been set very low. Two studies from the UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation elaborate on the strains in the testing process. In *A Case Study of the Texas Teacher Test* (1987), Lorrie Shepard describes how it might be possible to pass a teacher test by being testwise rather than by being skilled in the area the test was assessing. M. C. Ellwien and G. V. Glass infer from their *Case Studies on Education Standards* (1986) that teacher testing is mostly symbolic and has very little to do with actually identifying deficiencies and improving instruction. Many of the analyses of teacher testing involve the question of when it should occur (preservice? preteacher education program?) and to whom the sanctions should apply (the teacher? the degree-granting institution? the teacher training institution?).

Student achievement also can be used to estimate teaching effectiveness. It seems like a reasonable tactic; after all, teachers ought to help students learn. The use of such measures to assess teachers unfortunately adds new complexity to existing concerns about the validity of student testing. Minimally, these comparisons may necessitate complex tracking of students who enter particular teachers' classes.

Statistically equating students who have different entry competencies is sure to be an unsatisfactory way to compare teachers' relative merit in promoting achievement. While it's harder to teach students who have inadequate backgrounds, it's also difficult to show real improvement when a student group comes in with very strong achievement levels because of the way tests are typically developed. In either case, the achievement tests will probably misrepresent the nature of the teacher's effort. Fortunately, recent assessment systems for teachers are attempting to represent more broadly the nature of teachers' efforts.

There is little real agreement on what constitutes good teaching.

Quality of Schools

Who wants to know? The desire to find out how schools are doing is clearly legitimate, and educators, policymakers, and researchers continue to propose alternative sources of information. One of the problems we face is providing the right information to the right people. Congressional policymakers want to know whether the schools are working. At different times, their concern may be focused on the quality of what is learned (as in the post-Sputnik period) or on who is learning (when equity concerns are central on the educational agenda). Their needs are to assess the impact of resources they have invested and to target continuing or new needs. They need relatively unambiguous, clear information.

To an even greater extent, state-level policymakers are concerned with the effects of specific financing, curriculum, and certification policies—their efforts to reform schools in their states. Local school boards and administrations need information on the quality of their policy implementation and on progress toward discretionary goals, given the particular characteristics of their community.

Each set of policymakers needs different levels of detail and has different opportunities to influence the reality of classroom practice. The hodgepodge of conflicting information from local, state, and national evaluations doesn't make evaluation of educational effectiveness any easier. Some new approaches may offer some relief.

The federal government is now considering a funding proposal to transform the measurement practices of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) so that state-by-state comparisons will be possible. NAEP has been periodically measuring U.S. students in reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics. The administration of these measures presently allows for interpretation by broad geographical region, rather than by state. The proposal calls for administering these measures so that a representative sample of students in each state would be tested and described in NAEP reports. The proposal also expands the number of subjects assessed.

If accepted, this approach could focus the evaluation of schooling on the NAEP achievement measures. Is this a good thing? There is a clear division of opinion. Proponents argue that:

- A common basis for understanding student achievement would be systematically available if NAEP were expanded.
- The quality of measures would continue to improve because of the salience of the new measures.

- States could use such information for their own policy assessment to check their progress.
- Interpretation for policy purposes would be simplified.
- States would be able to compare themselves to subsets of other similar states.

Critics contend that:

- NAEP may turn into a national achievement test, and a national curriculum may follow.
- NAEP would not be sufficiently responsive to local or regional differences in curriculums, students, or economic factors to permit legitimate comparisons.
- NAEP would drive out state and local tests, which are more responsive to local curriculums.
- Pressure for school district comparisons will follow state comparisons.
- Because NAEP's strength is in making comparisons over time, the pressure to keep NAEP measures the same would inhibit development of new goals for the curriculum and new approaches to measurement.
- A single set of measures can be wrong. Given the state of understanding of achievement measurement, investing in different assessment approaches is the most prudent way to collect information that's relevant to policy.

For each of these points, both positive and negative, there are counter arguments, and counter-counter arguments. If the problem were simple, it would already be solved. What's significant is that the attractiveness of a clearly understood, single set of measures of American education is strong, even when the validity of the measures for assessing local and state educational policies is questioned. The state-by-state NAEP approach needs to be understood as an attempt to catch hold of what our schools are doing.

Another tack is the quality indicators movement. The goal of this effort is to identify and systematically collect information that can give a picture of the overall quality of American education, not just achievement test scores. Work in this area has been conducted by the Rand Corporation, the Center for Policy Research in Education at Rutgers, our own Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA, and numerous other institutions and scholars. Part of its impetus comes from the realm of economic indicators, where seemingly simple numbers like the Gross National Product, unemployment figures, and the Dow Jones average efficiently communicate the economic health of the country.

The Center for Education Statistics (a division of the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement) has been working on indicators of educational quality. These indicators include figures such as dropout rates, per capita student funding, student-teacher class ratios, enrollment figures, and the like. The problems the researchers encountered include the vastly different ways of reporting even such seemingly simple phenomena as dropout rates. Different districts and states count dropouts at different intervals, count them at different ages or grades, use different base rates, track student mobility differently, and so on. Getting everyone to agree on a single reporting approach, even for such an "easily understood" concept, is a Herculean task.

When the individual teacher is the focus of evaluation, we must allow for differences in pedagogical style.

Even so, outcomes like achievement test scores, college admission rates, or dropout figures represent the easiest indicators to collect. Quality indicators should also take into account input variables and measures of process.

Suppose we wanted a "quality indicator" related to some intermediate process, such as student coursework (in fact, UCLA and the Rand Corporation are collaborating to develop such indicators). We'd have to consider how to determine "quality" in a valid and comprehensive way, how to collect such information accurately and comfortably in schools, and how to report the findings so that the effects of educational reform can be tracked. If we (or others) can solve such a problem, educational achievement tests can be relieved of the perhaps excessive burden they carry as measures of the effects of different policies.

Changes such as adding coursework requirements, strengthening the content of the curriculum in a particular area, or requiring textbooks to exhibit certain content standards are all elements that policymakers hypothesize will help schools. Developing indicators of the extent to which these suggestions are followed is a first step; studying the relationship of the level of their use to resultant levels of student achievement is a second critical link.

Yet the indicator movement must be cautious about identifying a single magic index or number to stand for complex educational processes. As Leigh Burstein of UCLA points out, the context in which such data are reported, understood, and interpreted is central to the success of this effort.

Summary

The search for approaches to assess schools, their teachers, and students, will continue. This discussion has touched lightly on a number of complex issues. Controversies also will continue, and we can be sure that almost any decision will be rethought sometime in the future. Our interest as members of the research community is to keep a few issues in front of the public and the decisionmakers in this area.

First, we believe that the validity of any measure or indicator should be paramount, whether it is a measure of outcomes, like student achievement; of input, like teacher knowledge; or of processes, like student coursework. These measures should be designed so as to offer multiple or flexible ways to demonstrate success for different students. They should help us to pinpoint and fix weaknesses in policy and practice. Finally, these measures first must serve the interests of students and improve their schools. We must overcome our habit of preparing measures for the convenience of test

developers, administrators, legislators, or even teachers. Rather, we need to consider the impact that our approaches to assessing educational effectiveness will have on our current and future students.

For Further Reading

Assessing Student Achievement: A Profile of Classroom Practices. (CSE Monograph Series in Evaluation No. 11). Don W. Dorr-Bremme & Joan L. Herman. UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation, 1986.

This monograph is a study on the use of tests by a national sample of elementary and secondary math and English teachers—specifically, what they determine by testing, how frequently they administer tests, what types of tests they give, and what they think of tests.

Educational Indicators: A Guide for Policymakers. (CPRE Occasional Paper, No. OPE-01). Jeanne Oakes. The Rand Corporation, 1986.

This publication describes educational indicators, giving examples of tables, graphs, and interpretations. The document also includes discussions about the technical and political contexts of indicator interpretation.

Elementary and Secondary Education Indicators in Brief. Office for Educational Research and Improvement. OERI/Department of Education, 1987.

This document summarizes the latest findings relating to 17 educational indicators of outcomes, including reading and writing performance, resources such as expenditures per pupil, and context such as school enrollment and public opinion ratings of schools.

Task Structure Design: Beyond Linkage. (CSE Report No. 199). Eva L. Baker & Joan L. Herman. UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation, 1983.

This article describes how to design achievement tests using clear specifications to ensure congruency of instruction and assessment.

Trends in Educational Achievement. Congress of the United States Congressional Budget Office, 1986.

This document clearly analyzes the issues involved in measuring educational achievement by tests and presents interpretations on a variety of measures related to the recent upturn in achievement. The report also discusses group differences in performance.

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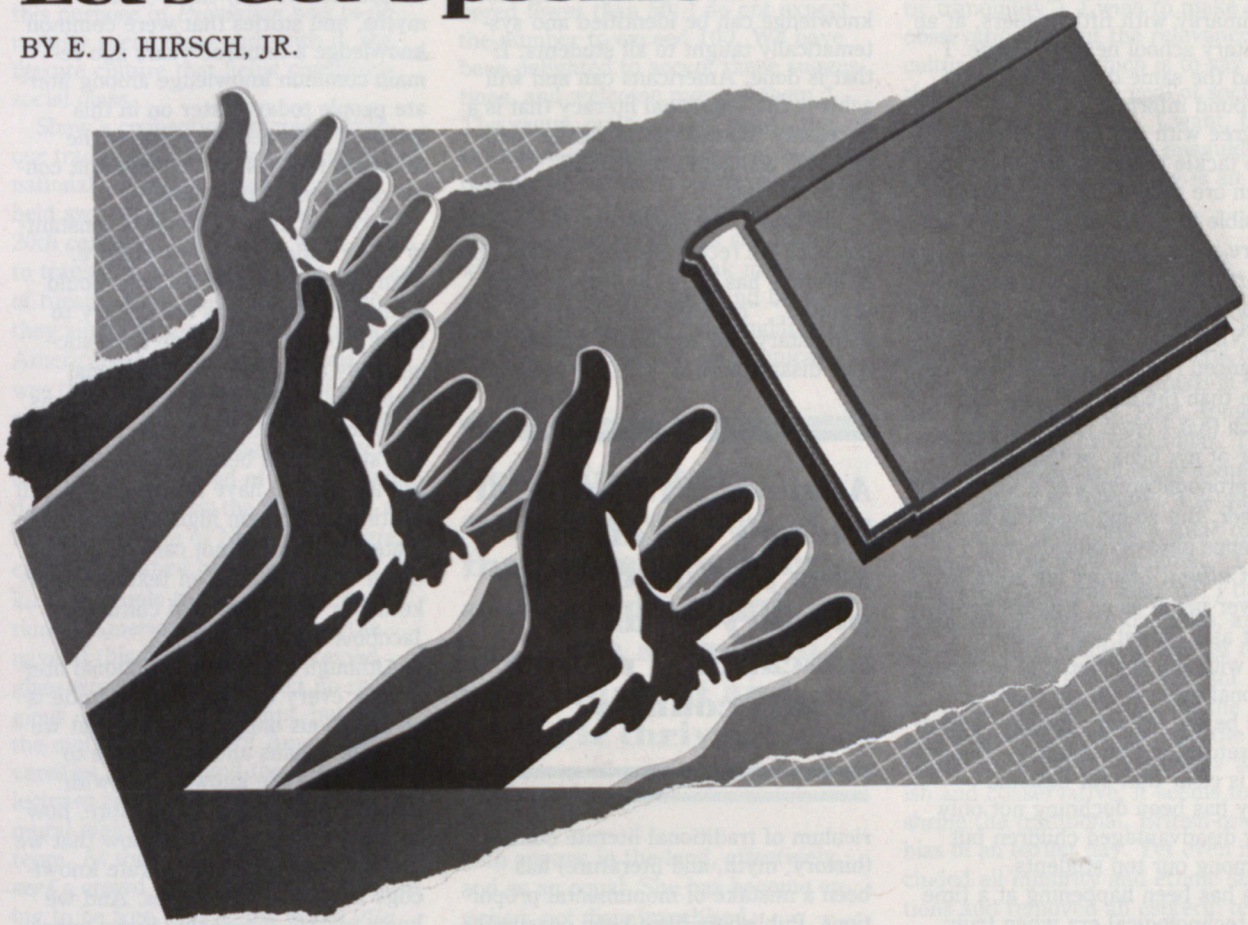
Cultural Literacy: Let's Get Specific

BY E. D. HIRSCH, JR.



The University of Virginia's E. D. Hirsch last year published a list of nearly 5,000 culturally relevant words and phrases that he insisted every student should know. That list has sparked a national furor—and this response from the author.

E.D. Hirsch, Jr. is the author of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know *and William R. Kenan Professor of English at the University of Virginia. At this writing, his book has remained on* The New York Times *bestseller list for more than 20 weeks—a rare achievement for a book about education.*

Let me begin by quoting a letter from a teacher. It is typical of many letters I have received from experienced educators about my book *Cultural Literacy*.

"Dear Mr. Hirsch,

"When I read the first chapter of your book *Cultural Literacy*, I thought I was hearing a voice from the past—mine—telling everyone I could that what was holding many children back in their reading comprehension was a lack of background information. This hit me over and over again during the years I was a Special Reading Teacher for middle school students in Baltimore City and Baltimore County—both in the inner-city ghetto and in the suburbs.

"Most of the time I was working with students of average or above-average intelligence. They were usually two or more years behind in their reading grade levels. Except for dyslectic children, many of these children were capable of decoding most of the words they had to read. Day after day children would be confused by terms and concepts that one would expect them to know.

"I, too, became aware that at the third grade level, most of the children I had to work with had been reading at or near grade level. When they

were retested at the fifth grade level they had already fallen behind.

"I retired from teaching eight years ago, but during the past two years I have been doing some volunteer tutoring, primarily with fifth graders, at an elementary school near my home. I still find the same deficit—a lack of background information.

"I agree with you that it is necessary to tackle this problem when the children are very young. It is almost impossible to catch up when the children are in middle school. . . ."

I start off by quoting this person's letter on the assumption that members of the NEA might find the view of an experienced reading teacher more persuasive than the abstract reading research that I cited in the second chapter of my book, or than the ivy tower pronouncements of a university professor. But sound research and experience always coincide, and I wrote *Cultural Literacy* not from my ivy-tower perch as an English professor but as a parent and a citizen. I began with the premise that achieving functional literacy for all citizens should be the primary focus of educational reform in this country. The evidence is clear that our national literacy has been declining not only among disadvantaged children but also among our top students.

This has been happening at a time in the technological era when truly functional literacy has become ever more important for achieving a wide range of national goals—from promoting social justice to attaining a productive economy and maintaining an effective military.

Defining Literacy

Undoubtedly these reasons for giving functional literacy a top priority are well known to all members of NEA. The theme that my book introduces into the discussion is in its insistence that functional literacy depends on readers' acquiring specific information and associations that can be taken for granted in written and spoken communications. Literacy is far more than the ability to call out words from a page. Functional literacy requires a knowledge of shared, taken-for-granted information that is neither set down on the page nor explicitly stated in oral communications. It provides the necessary frame of reference by which literate people understand the content of their reading. I argue that the core elements of this necessary background knowledge can be identified and systematically taught to all students. If that is done, Americans can and will achieve the functional literacy that is a necessary foundation for further educational, economic, and social improvements.

The book also shows that the chief cause of the recent decline in functional literacy has been the use of "skills-oriented," "relevant" materials in elementary and secondary grades. The disappearance from the early curriculum of traditional literate culture (history, myth, and literature) has been a mistake of monumental proportions. Publishers have been constantly "updating" the content that young children are taught, under the theory that modern, relevant materials will be of greater interest to children and will better teach them the skills of literacy than traditional materials. This theory assumes that reading, writing, and oral communication are formal skills rather than acquired abilities based on specific information. Unfortunately, the theory that reading and writing are formal skills is an empirically unsound theory that has had disastrous consequence for national literacy.

Achieving functional literacy for all citizens should be the primary focus of educational reform in this country.

Instead of trying to overhaul or update the core content of literate culture—something that cannot be done—publishers and schools should devote their energies to improving the effectiveness with which core literate content is presented. That content is highly stable. Yet most reviews of my book have failed to notice that its third chapter, which explains the stability of literate culture, is probably its most important contribution. The chapter shows why many facts, myths, and stories that were common knowledge a hundred years ago remain common knowledge among literate people today. Later on in this article, I will mention some of the technical reasons for this inherent conservatism of literate culture.

Of course, new material is constantly being added to literate culture. Many of its elements do and should change. History goes on. We try to make moral progress; we have successfully expanded our traditional materials to include the contributions of minorities. But the facts, myths, and stories that belong at the core of literate culture have remained and will continue to remain highly stable. Literate culture does not care a fig about either the exigencies of textbook marketing or the theories of cultural Jacobins.

Although the goal of functional literacy for every citizen by 12th grade is an ambitious one, it is a goal that we have the means and knowledge to accomplish. We know today, with more precision than ever before, how to achieve that goal. We know that we should start imparting literate knowledge in the earliest grades. And we know, within reasonable limits, what that knowledge consists of. We know enough to make every school an institutional Henry Higgins that, in the course of 13 years, can transform every Eliza Doolittle into a duchess.

Professor Henry Higgins in Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (later turned into the musical *My Fair Lady*) was modeled on Professor Henry Sweet, who was the most distinguished linguist of late Victorian England. To Shaw, it was critically important for the point he was making that Professor Higgins should be a world-class expert who knew exactly what he was up to. Higgins was effective as a teacher because he was knowledgeable enough to be specific. He was able to focus on the specific phonetic and cultural elements that Eliza needed to know. *Pygmalion* was meant to be and still is a profound statement about education. Shaw wanted to show that

the difference in social class between a Covent-Garden flower girl and a duchess consisted in a limited body of knowledge that could be taught effectively under expert instruction. Part of this purpose in *Pygmalion* was to demystify social class and, with it, the literate culture that helps constitute social class.

Shaw's conception coincides with our traditional American conception of national education, especially as it held sway in the late 19th and early 20th century. Our schools were meant to transform all comers. Only, instead of turning every Eliza into a duchess, they aimed to turn everyone into an American—a person who, in our lore, was the equal of any person of rank. It was a noble and inspiring ideal, and one that we are in danger of forgetting. To be reminded of it, one cannot do better than visit the Great Hall at the City College of New York, a great cathedral-shaped building that is a kind of temple to the ideal of education as Americanization. Along the nave of this Great Hall are stained glass windows which depict no religious scenes or sentiments, but rather the mottos and seals of American universities. And, behind the altar, where lectures are given, there rises a huge mural which is the focus of the vast room. At the left of this mural, one sees a crowd of huddled masses yearning to be free, and as the scene progresses to the right, one sees the bent and ragged figures being tapped with a wand by the radiant goddess of education. From her touch they emerge on the far right with mortar boards on their heads, upright and beaming. Education has transformed them all into equal citizens.

Or as Shelley said, "The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains/ Scepterless, free, uncircumscribed—but man/Equal, unclassed, tribeless . . ./Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king/Over himself."

This inspiring vision of national education has been criticized in recent years as cultural imperialism. Schools, instead of continuing to indoctrinate everyone in the literate natural culture, should encourage and celebrate multicultural diversity. But American literate culture has itself assimilated many of the materials that those who favor multiculturalism wish to include. The ethnic or minority items that people have suggested as additions to the preliminary list that is printed at the back of *Cultural Literacy* have numbered fewer than 50; I do not expect the number to exceed 100. We have been delighted to accept these suggestions, and welcome more of them.* The vague, multicultural conception of education (whatever the term really refers to in concrete terms) omits to notice that an Eliza Doolittle is precisely as multicultural as she might wish to be. She can break into Cockney whenever she likes, and because she has *also* learned the standard literate language, she can communicate with anyone in the land, effectively and as an equal. She has become enriched, not disenfranchised.

Schoolteachers essentially created the modern nation-state, and schoolteachers alone can perpetuate it and make it thrive.

This benefit to Eliza as an individual is multiplied enormously when one considers the benefit to the nation that would ensue if our whole educational system were to operate on Shaw's design. The first consequence would be, of course, universal literacy, whose benefits I have already mentioned. We could all address each other as equals, with understanding and civility. No other national effort that we could make would be more likely to promote the general welfare and insure domestic tranquility. By contrast, no principle is more likely to defeat those fundamental aims of our Constitution than the encouragement of cultural separation, which promotes illiteracy, incivility, class warfare, not to mention low economic productivity.

Having alluded just now to the preamble of the Constitution ("promote the general welfare and insure domestic tranquility"), I wish to make some observations about the relevance of cultural literacy (which is to say functional literacy) to the goal of social justice through education. I want, first of all, to focus on the very misguided claim that cultural literacy is an elitist educational goal.

The 'List' and Elitism

No doubt, a casual look at the provisional list of culturally relevant terms printed in the back of my book might give some people an impression of elitism, for two reasons. First, some of the items might be unfamiliar. This quite understandably leads some people to reason as follows: "I'm quite literate, so if I don't know some of the items, the list must be elitist." I am sympathetic to that reaction. I think it is correct in several instances, and we are constantly adapting the list to new comments and suggestions. But I believe that the main basis for the accusation of elitism comes from the observation that the list seems WASP-ish and conservative; it seems to enshrine the traditional, British-oriented bias of an earlier day. Yet even if it included all minority and ethnic suggestions and removed all esoteric terms, any index to American literate culture would still remain preponderantly British-oriented and traditional and thus apparently elitist.

It is true that many of the richest and best-educated Americans of the 19th and early 20th centuries were white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant, and it's true that the literate culture they possessed is still dominantly present in American literate culture. But to think that literate culture is WASP-ish and elitist just because the educated people who possessed it happened to be, is to reason *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, which an expert in critical thinking will quickly identify as a logical fallacy. It's true that the WASP elite of America possessed traditional literate culture, but not because they were born to it. As children, they had to be (often unwillingly) educated into it. They had to learn literate culture in

*The address of the Cultural Literacy Foundation is 2012-B Morton Drive, Charlottesville, VA 22901. The Foundation is a nonprofit tax-deductible organization devoted to the advancement of literacy in the United States.

order to become literate. And still today, every literate person in India, Scotland, Africa, Wales, Ireland, and Australia, no matter what color or religion, has had to learn that same traditional literate culture of English. Zeus and Athene are not after all WASP. St. Augustine is not a WASP. Confucius is not a WASP. In short, literate culture is in essence neither WASP nor elitist. It is simply the traditional knowledge required for literacy in any longstanding literate language—in this case, English.

Linguists have long known that literate culture is inherently traditional in character. Literacy preserves traditional forms and points of reference, because the vast numbers of books and people who use those forms and points of reference endow literacy with an inertia that is difficult to change by mere fiat. Everyone is familiar with the inertia of modern English spelling, which exhibits such oddities as "enough," "doubt," and "light." Yet, very few spelling reforms have taken hold in modern English. Spelling is fixedly conservative. No sane liberal would argue against teaching students traditional spelling. The inertia and conservatism of spelling are but extreme examples of the conservative character of all literate culture.

Every modern nation since the industrial revolution has had to create both a standard literate language and a standard literate culture. The two elements, language and culture, were developed in tandem to create a medium of communication that could be used all over the nation by citizens who were not known to one another. Only the ability of citizens to communicate over time and space through speech and writing has enabled industrialized nations to thrive economically and politically. The linguistic and cultural history of every industrial nation in the world has followed or has attempted to follow the pattern. Wherever it has failed to achieve that aim, as for example in China, it has suffered politically and economically.

Despite the unpalatable sound of "standard literate language" and "standard literate culture," both history and logic support the idea that a core of cultural and linguistic standardization is necessary. Without it no large industrial nation has worked or could work. It follows that the fewer Americans know our traditional linguistic and cultural norms, the less well our nation works.

Change of the literate culture, desirable as it may be, can take place only within sharp limits. That was a lesson learned by the French Revolutionists as well as by the proponents of the Great Cultural Revolution of China. Both attempts were doomed to fail and did fail, even under autocratic regimes. How much less likely of success are such attempts in a free nation.

We need to identify those elements of literate culture that are known to insiders but not to outsiders.

Let me repeat the basic reason for this robust conservatism of literacy. After having existed for many centuries, literate culture acquires an inertia that makes it inherently resistant to radical change. Of course, the periphery of literate culture does constantly change. Oliver Norths come and go. But Lincoln and Jefferson remain. The core of shared literate culture has been extended broadly over time and space, and is understood by millions of people and millions of books; its central words and traditions are almost as difficult to alter as are its spellings.

The School's Role

And here is another critical fact about literacy that has been common to all industrial nations: The literate national language and culture of every nation has necessarily been a *school-transmitted* language and culture. The chief agents of the modern nation have been not just political and industrial leaders, but schoolteachers. Schoolteachers essentially created the modern nation-state, and schoolteachers alone can perpetuate it and make it thrive. When the schools of a nation cease to transmit effectively the literate language and culture, the unity and effectiveness of the nation will necessarily decline.

It's possible that the American public as a whole has instinctively recognized these connections between nationhood and literate culture. It may be that the astonishing amount of newspaper coverage given to my book reflects an instinctive recognition of the momentous issues at stake in the educational reforms it advocates. So, although my third chapter has not been dealt with in reviews, its implications have been understood intuitively by many people who haven't even opened the book. The letters I have received show that people understand very well the conservatism of literacy and its importance to the nation. They concur in the view that a changeable, untraditional curriculum cannot alter literate culture, but only condemn to illiteracy those students who happen to come from illiterate homes. These correspondents have understood that a so-called "progressive," skills-oriented curriculum merely consolidates class distinctions and preserves the status quo.

I'll give just one decisive illustration of the social regressiveness of a "progressive" curriculum. A few years ago two economists, Finis Welch and James Smith, published a monograph called *Closing the Gap*. The gap they referred to was the income gap between Blacks and whites who had finished the same level of education. Welch and Smith showed that this income gap had started to close even before the civil rights movement gathered force. Through careful analysis they also showed that the chief factor in this progress toward social justice has been a gradual equalizing of the quality of education given to whites and Blacks. Thus, despite racial prejudice in the early years of this century, those Americans who entered the economy with higher skills (chiefly higher literacy skills) gained higher income regardless of race. As the literacy gap closed, so did the income gap. And the progress was fairly constant up to the 1970s when the analysis of Welch and Smith ended.

Widening Wage Gap

On the basis of the Welch-Smith analysis, I made a prediction. Because the civil rights movement has now given Blacks and whites more equal educational opportunities, one would expect the income gap to continue closing, assuming that the education available to all had stayed constant. But we know that the outcomes of education have been declining in the past 15 years, as indicated by national measures of reading ability.

Because of this decline in literacy during the past two decades, I predicted that the wage gap would start opening up again, because a less effective teaching of literacy would have a more adverse effect on Blacks than on whites. My reasoning was this: A larger percentage of whites than Blacks would get literate culture in their homes, to make up for what has been missing in the school curriculum. So, although literacy rates have declined for all students, the decline would be greater for Blacks, and this differential would be reflected in the economic sphere. To test the hypothesis, I plotted a year-by-year curve from 1973 to 1983 for the decline in mean SAT verbal scores. For these same years I plotted the mean wage differentials for whites and Blacks who went into the workforce with a 12th-grade education. The year-by-year decline in overall literacy almost exactly paralleled the year-by-year reopening of the wage gap between the races.

The importance of a return to a literate curriculum is not, however, limited to poor or minority students. Far from it. The literacy of middle-class children has also been declining, which means that the country as a whole is becoming less literate, just at a time when advanced technology and the widening of the service economy have made high literacy more essential than in previous eras. The skills curriculum, which has now been dominant for several decades, is gradually creating a second generation of middle-class students who are even less literate than their parents, who studied under the same untraditional skills curriculum. What can we learn from the first generation of progressively educated children, who grew up in households that included more literate culture than their own households now provide their children? Sad but true, they are being deprived of a rich literate culture at home, making the content of the school curriculum more important for the middle class today than it was in previous decades.

Of course, the decline of literacy in the American middle class accounts for a decline in communication skills in the country as a whole. Large companies complain that their younger executives cannot communicate well, even though those affluent young executives still give credibility to the grand old American notion that you don't need good grammar to become rich. But in the modern world, that idea has become less and less realistic. Semi-literate people who happen to be rich or powerful in today's world would be less so if they had to compete with people who could communicate better than they.

Schools should teach a coherent curriculum—both intensive and extensive—based on the elements of literate culture.

That is exactly what has happened in the international sphere vis-a-vis Japan. Our county has become less rich and powerful as it has been forced to compete with better-educated, hence more productive economies. Despite durable American myths to the contrary, the semi-literate but rich person is a vanishing species in the modern world, including even the USA.

So much for misconceptions about the conservatism and elitism of traditional literate culture. Political liberals, of whom I count myself one, must be alert to the paradox that educational conservatism is in fact a socially progressive policy. Educational liberalism, by contrast, with its emphasis on relevance, diversity, and skills, has *proved* itself to be a socially regressive policy. Once we understand the inherent conservatism of literacy, this paradox is easily explained and the way is open to making education reform a nonideological project. All parties are constrained by the reality that educational conservatism alone can achieve political, economic, and social progress. We liberals make a bad bargain if we choose pious slogans about multiculturalism over the realities of the conservatism of literacy. We thereby cede to political conservatives the only really practical policy for educational and social progress, making those conservatives, willy-nilly, more truly progressive than ourselves. As this paradox is more widely understood, curriculum reform should become a more multi-partisan effort.

For that effort to succeed, however, we shall have to be specific about the content of literate culture. For reform to work, we need to get down to specifics. We need to identify those elements of literate culture that are known to insiders but not to outsiders. That is to say, we have to create a list that will help make literate culture the province of the dispossessed. These days, the dispossessed comprise not just minorities but also large numbers of the middle class.

Since most discussions of my book have focused on its provisional list, those who favor the cultural literacy project have said that the list is basically sound, while others have gleefully pointed out that the list exhibits some egregious omissions and inconsistencies. Both comments are right. The list is basically sound, and it does exhibit some egregious omissions and inconsistencies. We are continually repairing these errors, and we continue to invite suggestions. But even in its defective state the list has proved to be essentially accurate. Well-educated people make up most of the objectors. Critics of the list are able to make their complaints public, because their public can be expected to recognize that the complaints are valid. Thus, every objection to the details of the list implicitly concedes the principle of shared literate culture. In fact, the most useful comments on the list have come from its critics rather than its supporters.

Other critics of *Cultural Literacy* have voiced a rather more substantial

and interesting objection. They accept the *Pygmalion* approach to literate culture, but nonetheless predict that when such an approach leaves the covers of my book and enters the sphere of actual practice, it may become prey to abuses that will make the cure worse than the disease. Some have expressed the fear that the net result of demystifying literate culture and bringing it to everyone will be to trivialize it. The schools, they predict, will set aside special cultural literacy hours, and will go down the list alphabetically, giving students deadening instruction that will be instantly forgotten. These prophets of failure paint a picture of nitwit teachers and idiot principals who will propose to teach an incoherent encyclopedia.

I don't deny that such abuses are possible with any educational idea, however soundly conceived. But those who prophesy trivialization should at least read what I have said in my book about putting cultural literacy into practice in the schools. The book makes clear that schools should teach a coherent curriculum—both extensive and intensive—based on the elements of literate culture. What's more, the book also insists that literate culture, like any other knowledge, can only be taught successfully if it is embedded in interesting, coherent, motivational materials. The book makes a discrimination (as the prophets of trivialization do not) between levels of understanding in early and later grades. Obviously, the methods and emphases that motivate learning vary from grade to grade as well as from student to student. But perhaps the most decisive answer to prophets of trivialization is to remind them that there are worse things than trivialization, two of them being fragmentation and widespread illiteracy. Unless naysayers can recommend a better plan for overcoming these two ills, they condemn us to perpetuate them. My challenge is always to say: "Let's get specific."

Getting Specific

My colleagues and I have proposed a specific plan to encourage the effective teaching of literate culture. The plan includes creating well-designed tests of general knowledge. Such tests, if widely used, would tend to make the issue of trivialization moot. For only a student who really knew literate culture could perform well on properly designed tests. These tests are now being completed. Twelfth-grade versions of them have been field tested in California and Virginia and will be published next year by the Cultural Literacy Foundation, a charitable foundation to which I have assigned ownership of the tests. In addition, we have prepared a 12th-grade dictionary of cultural literacy that describes the information students need to know to make *100* on any version of the tests.

In addition to making up these 12th-grade materials, the Cultural Literacy Foundation has secured the help of scholars and teachers to create a sound sequence for systematically working up to them. When this work is consolidated, the Foundation will be able to make further tests and dictionaries for elementary and middle grades. The advantage of these sequenced tests (for third, sixth, and ninth grades) will be two-fold. First, the information on which they are based will be known to everyone in advance, in the form of dictionaries arranged by subject matter. That open-door policy will give everyone a fair shot at the tests and remove the issue of cultural bias. Secondly, the tests will leave schools entirely free to determine the most suitable approaches and emphases for teaching literate culture.

I see no insuperable barrier to universal, national literacy within the lifetime of our children.

The tests are saying in effect: "We don't care how you manage to make people literate. We don't care what political or moral or ethnic slant you apply to the material. We don't care whether you spend a lot of school time or a little in conveying the information. We only want to be sure that you do convey it effectively, so that your students will be literate." The policy of the Cultural Literacy Foundation is not to support any one method for teaching literate culture, but rather to describe its elements in a sound sequence, to create a series of dictionaries that define these sequenced contents and to offer a sequenced series of tests for determining whether literate culture has been successfully taught. We wish to leave specific methods to the wisdom, taste, and expertise of those who teach and those who supervise teaching.

I want to end these remarks with a general observation about our chances of attaining universal functional literacy through effective educational reform. Within the educational establishment I have encountered a certain amount of weary defeatism, along the lines of the first Coleman Report, which was taken to show that the job just can't be done by the schools alone. I have been told by educators that people have always complained about our educational shortcomings, that there never was a golden age of education, that things always have been bad, and probably always will be. Cultural literacy is just another simple-minded panacea doomed to failure like the Checklist for Teachers and the New Math. And I have heard other, similarly mournful and defeatist attitudes. One reviewer bluntly said that my book is just too optimistic.

But my reply to all this is that education is the field par excellence for optimists. If we aren't optimists, why are we in teaching at all? We will hardly make progress in education if we believe beforehand that we can't. Most good teachers I know are both realists and at the same time tenacious optimists. It's a puzzle to me why anyone but an optimist would want to devote his or her life to education. And nowadays our optimism is better grounded than ever, in light of significant advances in our understanding of literacy. In a country as rich and vigorous as ours, I see no insuperable barrier to universal national literacy within the lifetime of our children.

For Further Reading

Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the National Commission on Reading. R.C. Anderson and others. National Institute of Education, 1985.

A short, authoritative description of what current research has taught us about the nature of reading, and the best means to teach reading. For scholars, the report provides detailed references to the scientific literature. On the subject of cultural literacy the report has this to say (p. 61): "Even for beginners, reading should not be thought of simply as a 'skill subject.' It is difficult to imagine, for instance, that kindergartners could be called literate for their age if they did not know *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* or *Peter Rabbit*. For each age there are fables, fairytales, folk tales, classic and modern works of fiction that embody the core of our cultural heritage."

College-Bound Seniors: Eleven Years of National Data from the College Board's Admission Testing Program, 1973-83. The College Board, 1984.

Although the verbal SAT has been rightly criticized for its negative educational and social influences, it is, from a technical standpoint, a sound test. As John Carroll has pointed out, it is a sensitive measure of a student's vocabulary, and little else. For that reason, despite its harmful side-effects, the verbal SAT is a sound measure of a student's literacy level. Breadth of vocabulary has a very high correlation with level of literacy. Since words stand for things, a broad vocabulary attests a broad knowledge of things, not just of words. About a million students take the SAT each year. This report, along with other documents, shows that the actual numbers of students who scored over 600 declined from 11.4 percent to 7.3 percent between 1973 and 1983. Among the best students, having scores over 650, the decline was from 5.29 to 3.0 percent! The decline of the *average* SAT verbal score over the past 25 years forms a slope that an Olympic skier would have difficulty skiing down. We know from field tests that scores on the Verbal SAT have a high correlation with scores on tests of cultural literacy.

The Court and the Constitution. Archibald Cox. Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

For an insight into why a uniform sphere of discourse as well as uniform set of laws have grown in importance since the 19th century, two chapters of Cox's eloquent book can be read with profit: "4. Opening a National Market" and "5. One Nation Indivisible." Cox argues that the economy was the cause of ever greater breadth and uniformity in the application of the Commerce Clause of the Constitution. The argument for a similar commonality in education is similarly compelling.

Mankind, Nation, and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View. Otto Jespersen. Indiana University Press, 1945.

A great linguist's perspective on literacy and standard language in a nation. Jespersen was a strong advocate of bringing people together through linguistic standardization. History showed him that failure to achieve such linguistic unification always causes culture to war against culture and class against class. He pointed out, perhaps before anyone else, that a literate national language was not an elite dialect, but was in fact the least elite and most democratic language and culture of a nation.

Nations and Nationalism. Ernest Gellner. Cornell University Press, 1983.

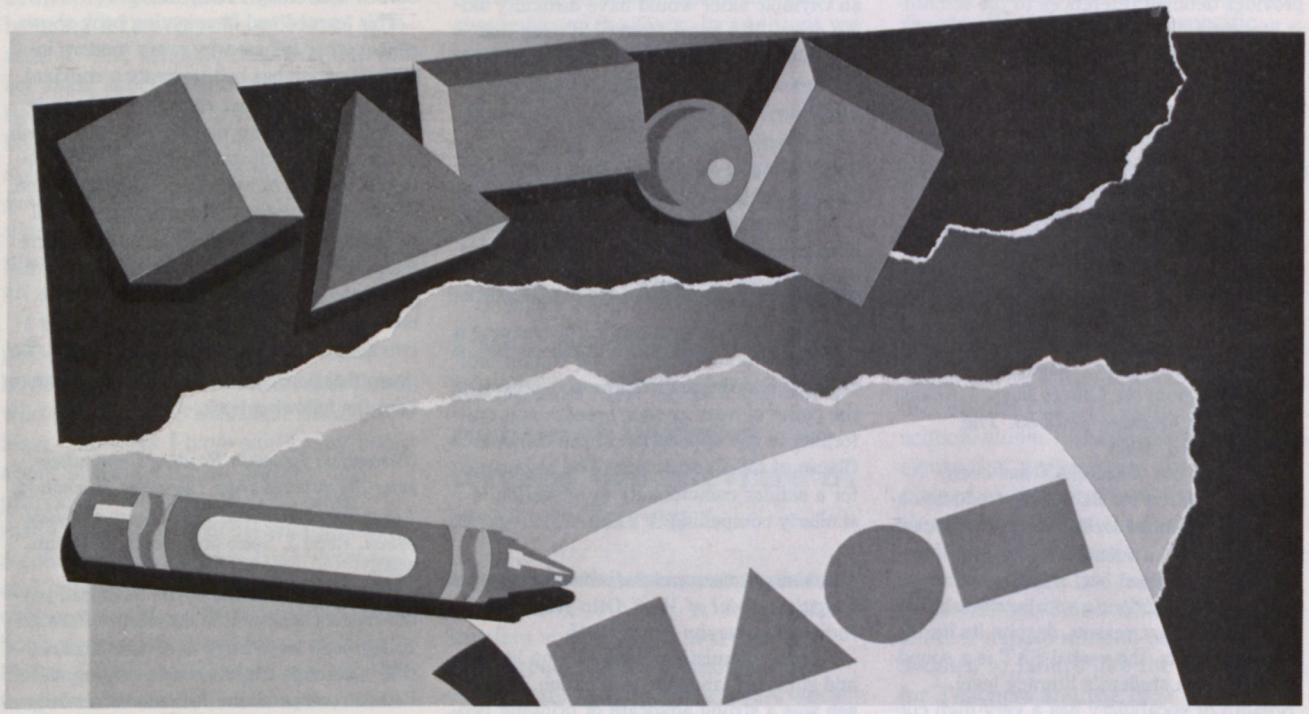
This learned and illuminating book shows, among other things, why every modern industrial nation has had to create a standard national language and culture. The book is essential reading for anyone who might wish to argue that such standardization is *not* essential to modern nationhood and commerce. Gellner's argument that a modern national economy requires a shared standard culture finds confirmation in U.S. history, which discloses the growing need for uniformity in laws governing interstate commerce. The two kinds of uniformity are closely allied. To grasp that point one cannot do better than to read the following book.

Theoretical Issues in Reading Comprehension: Perspectives from Cognitive Psychology, Linguistics, Artificial Intelligence and Education. Rand J. Spiro and others. Erlbaum, 1981.

For those interested in the technical, psychological research into the need for shared background knowledge in communication, this is perhaps the most wide-ranging and detailed compendium. It is recommended primarily for those who have a taste for reading about research and about the kinds of ingenious experiments that have yielded new insights into literacy.

Educating the Very Young: A Call for Clear Thinking

BY DAVID ELKIND



Early childhood education programs should be more than just parking places for kids. Agreed. But what should they teach, and who should run them? Do all kids need them? Can we ever agree?

David Elkind is professor of child study and senior resident scholar at the Lincoln Filene Center at Tufts University in Massachusetts. Elkind is the current president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. One of his best-known works is The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast, Too Soon. *His latest book is* Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk.

Education theorists from Plato to Maria Montessori have recognized that the education of preschool children is on a continuum with the formal education provided by the schools—and that, indeed, there can be meaningful schools for preschool children.

In our own day, there is a growing demand for out-of-home programs for preschool children. But this demand does not grow out of a Platonic concern for the proper upbringing of the young or even out of a Montessorian concern that young children be given the kind of intellectual stimulation needed to nurture their budding mental abilities. Rather, the contemporary demand for out-of-home programs for young children derives first and foremost from parents' need for quality child care while they work and pursue careers. Theorists like Plato and Montessori wanted professionals to rear young children because they felt it was too important a task to be left to parents. Today's parents want professionals to care for their young children because they do not have the time to do so themselves.

The difference is very important. For the theorists, providing young children with a sound education was justification for separating a young child from its parents. For today's parents, however, work and career are the reasons they put young children

into out-of-home programs. Providing children with early childhood education is often merely a rationalization for putting young children in out-of-home programs.

It is because today's parents—and to some extent teachers and educational administrators—do not fully appreciate the nature and value of early childhood education that there is so much confusion in the field today. In some respects, schools are involved in early childhood education for the wrong reasons. They're responding to the demand of parents for quality child care facilities, rather than to convictions about the benefits of early childhood education. To help clarify the nature and value of early childhood education and its place within the educational enterprise, I will address some of the most frequently asked questions about the education of young children.

Can early childhood education be more than custodial care?

It seems to me that this question raises an artificial dichotomy between education and child care. At all levels of education, there is some degree of child care. This is true even at the university level, where the concept of *in loco parentis* was generally accepted until the revolutions of the 1960s and seems to be reemerging now. And the child-care functions of the public school are increasing as more and more of them provide before-and after-school programs for children of parents who work. And, of course, in boarding schools the child care responsibility of the schools is very large indeed.

Preschool Prep School?

So the issue is not education versus child care but rather what proportion of each of these two components should be provided at any particular level of schooling. It is certainly true, that programs for young children must, of necessity, involve more child care than must programs for elementary school children, but the difference is relative, not absolute. Teachers at the preschool level must do more comforting, more limit setting, more crisis intervention than teachers at the higher grade levels. But they are also helping young children acquire the fundamental concepts of space, time, number, causality, relations, and nature—concepts that form the essential data base for all later learning. In addition, preschool teachers help children acquire the preacademic language and social skills, such as paying attention and taking turns, that formal education presupposes.

Does an an early start mean an early finish?

Is education a race? In a race, it is certainly true that an early start may give the competitor a better chance of winning. But education is not a race. There is certainly not a starting point—nor is there a finish line. A diploma does not signify that one has won a race but only that one has learned enough to go on learning at a particular level. Education, in the broadest sense, is an ongoing adaptation to our social and physical environment; it ends only when we do.

It is important to assert the nature and value of early childhood education in its own right.

The idea of early childhood education as an early start that insures an early finish in an educational race is, in part at least, an unfortunate by-product of the Head Start programs. Numerous studies, including one done in 1983 by the Consortium of Longitudinal Studies, show that Head Start programs have provided much-needed health and education benefits for millions of disadvantaged preschool children. There is no question as to their value for the families they serve. Nonetheless, the choice of the phrase "Head Start" was unfortunate. "Head Start" does imply a race. And not surprisingly, when middle-income parents heard that low-income children were being given a "Head Start," they wanted a similar "Head Start" for their children.

But education is not a race. There is absolutely no evidence that a child who is taught to read at the age of three has any lasting advantage over a child who learns to read at age six or seven.* Indeed, the evidence all points in the other direction. In the 1930s Carlton Washburn compared classes of children who had been taught to read in first grade with children who had been taught to read at ages seven and eight. He found that when these young people reached adolescence, both groups read at comparable levels. But the late reading group were more interested, spontaneous readers than were the early reading group.

Starting children in formal academics too early may, in fact, do more harm than good. Cross-cultural data (described in *Comparative Reading: Cross-National Studies of Behavior and Processes in Reading and Writing*, Macmillan, 1973) are quite convincing in this regard. In Denmark, where reading instruction follows a language experience approach and formal instruction is delayed until age seven, there is almost no illiteracy. In contrast, in France, where state-mandated formal instruction in reading begins at age five, some 30 percent of the children experience reading problems. Likewise the data from two studies (one by Benjamin Bloom and one by June Cox and others) and a recent Gallup survey of people who have attained eminence make it very clear that the parents of gifted children did not impose their learning priorities upon their young offspring. Rather they followed the child's lead, emphasizing play and a rich, stimulating environment rather than formal instruction. Education, then, is not a race, and teaching the wrong things at too early an age constitutes miseducation, putting children at risk for short-term stress and long-term learning problems—for no purpose.

The Disadvantaged

Is preschool education crucial for disadvantaged children?

This question has to be answered in

*This is true only when the initiative for reading instruction comes from the adult, not from the child. Children who spontaneously evidence an interest in reading (i.e., have a structural imperative for it) should of course be helped when they ask for assistance and be encouraged by the provision of ample, appropriate books and of unhurried time to explore them.

both the broad and narrow sense of *crucial*. In the broadest sense, healthy early childhood education is crucial for all children. All young children will benefit from the opportunity and support for fully developing their intellectual, emotional, and social abilities. To the extent that disadvantaged children are perhaps less likely to receive such education at home or at school than are advantaged children, special efforts need to be made in order to insure that disadvantaged children get off to a good start.

There is, however, a narrower sense in which the word *crucial* is used. Is early childhood education crucial for disadvantaged children to succeed academically as students and occupationally as adults? This is a more complex question, with social and political overtones. It harks back to some of the motivations for introducing early childhood education into this country during the last half of the 19th century. The first early childhood programs were for the children of immigrants, whose parents had to work. It was hoped that these early childhood programs would socialize children and keep them from becoming delinquent as teenagers.

I feel strongly that the schools, at whatever level, should not be used to solve social problems that do not originate in the schools. My objection to busing was not that I was in any way opposed to integration, but that I could not see how busing was going to change adult attitudes. It seemed unlikely to me that a child who went to an integrated school but who never saw Blacks (or whites) in his or her home or community was going to be any less prejudiced than a child attending a nonintegrated school. Without parents making an attempt at integration, integration in the schools alone was bound to fail, at least as a way of solving the problems of racial prejudice and discrimination.

In the narrow sense of whether early childhood education is crucial for resolving the problems of poverty, unequal opportunity, cultural bias, and racial prejudice in our country, the answer is quite clearly no! Early childhood education should not be expected any more than education in general to solve social problems whose roots and dynamisms lie elsewhere. I dearly wish we could stop using education to ease our guilty consciences about the social ills in our society.

On the other hand, healthy early childhood education *in combination with* comprehensive health care, education, and job training for parents would go far towards alleviating some of the social problems of our society.

Preschool Curriculum

What skills, if any, should a preschool teach?

A basic misunderstanding about the education of preschool children is that it should be involved with teaching—albeit at a more elementary level—the skills that are taught in first grade. The error here is the assumption that young children are lacking in learning skills! This is not at all the case. In many ways, the four- and five-year-old child is like the nine- or 10-year-old child who has mastered reading and math and can now put these skills to use acquiring other information.

Early childhood education should not be expected—any more than education in general—to solve social problems whose roots lie elsewhere.

Young children have a variety of learning skills at their command. What they need is the opportunity to exercise these skills, not to learn new ones. Consider the learning skills preschool children have at their disposal. First of all, they can *discriminate* large from small, black from white, soft from hard, and so on. In addition, they can *match to sample*, that is, given a picture of a boat they can select a similar boat from a group of pictures of different objects. They can also *classify* like objects—put all the brown beads in one pile and all the white ones in another. And they can begin to *seriate* according to size, indicating the smallest, next smallest, and so on. What young children need are the materials and the opportunities to use these skills to acquire a variety of concepts.

This is not to say that young children do not have to learn anything in the way of math or language, but only that they have to learn math and language *concepts* that will then make it possible to learn higher order math and language skills. For example, through classifying and seriating many different materials, children eventually get to the point where they can construct a notion of a "unit," something that is both like and different from something else.** A true unit concept is basic to performing all arithmetic operations and hence to the attainment of all math skills.

Young children are already equipped with the skills they need to construct the concepts on which to base the further skills they will acquire through formal instruction. Teaching young children academic skills is miseducation, because it fails to take account of the child's existing skills and the concepts the child must construct with them.

Young children do need to learn some skills, but not the formal reading and math skills that are more appropriately and effectively taught at later age levels.

Should the preschool program reproduce the structure of the kindergarten?

The answer to this question depends upon what is meant by the "structure" of the kindergarten. In education, structure tends to be a very ambiguous word, used in many different ways by many different people. If a kindergarten is a true kindergarten, that is, if it provides a developmentally appropriate curriculum, then such a program would, with some slight modifications, be appropriate for four-year-olds. An age-appropriate program for young children takes account of their specific modes of learning and provides an environment—a structure—that enables children to fully ex-

**A number, as a true unit, is like every other number in the sense that it is a number, yet different from every other number in its order of enumeration. *Three* is like all other numbers in that it is a number, but different from all others in that it is the only number that comes after *two* and before *four*.

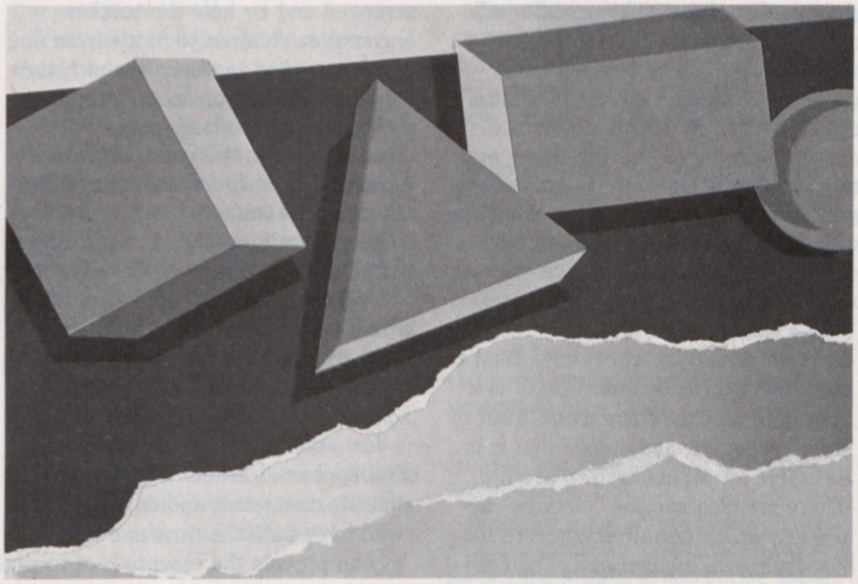
ploit these learning modes.

The learning of young children is *manipulative* and *fundamental*, as opposed to the learning of older children and adults, which is primarily *symbolic* and *derived*. Young children learn through direct interaction with persons, places, and things. They must learn firsthand about hot and cold, sweet and sour, green and red, square and round, up and down, and much more. This is manipulative fundamental learning for which there really is no substitute. A congenitally blind person can be told about red or green but can never really get a true idea of color. The blind person's learning of color is symbolic, by way of words, and derived from the experience of others, rather than fundamental, constructed from the blind person's own experience.

The young child's learning is also *permeable* rather than *compartmentalized*, as it is in older children and adults. The categories of reading, math, science, social studies, and art are really not appropriate for young children, whose minds are not organized according to adult categories. Partly because their learning is permeable, and partly because what they are learning is at such an entry level, they are always learning in many different domains at once. Accordingly, young children learn in "spreads" rather than in "steps." Children making soup, for example, are learning the names of the vegetables (language), the shapes of the vegetables (geometry), the weights of the ingredients (math), and the effect of heating up the contents (science)—not to mention social cooperation in making and enjoying a consumable product.

Young children are also guided by what I have called the *structural imperative*, a need to find stimuli to exercise their emerging mental abilities. To illustrate, young children who are just acquiring quantitative skills spontaneously count any set of things they can find. And some children—about one or three per 100—have a structural imperative for reading. They teach themselves to read and ask adults for help when they need it.

Finally, *play* is an important learning mode that serves a somewhat different function among young children



Education is not a race, and teaching the wrong things at too early an age constitutes miseducation.

than it will at a later age. Young children have few ego defenses; they frequently lose self-esteem. Play is a means of asserting their competence and restoring their self-esteem. While young children may learn something academic from, say, playing with dinosaurs, that learning is secondary to what they gain in self-confidence and self-esteem by being able to assert their competence over those large creatures. In short, we must not attempt to transform a young child's play into a lesson.

The structure of an effective kindergarten classroom provides an environment conducive to the full utilization of these modes of learning. Such a classroom is organized into "interest" (not subject matter) areas, where children can acquire fundamental concepts through active manipulation. The teacher works with small groups of children and helps to guide their inquiry. Providing a balance scale and then asking children to predict what happens when a nail is put in one cup and a feather in another is an example of teacher-guided inquiry.

Group activities and a readily accessible play area are other components of healthy early childhood programs. A teacher-child ratio of not more than 1 to 15 is still another ingredient. All these components help the child maximize fundamental and manipulative learning, encourage permeability, provide nourishment for the structural imperative, and support the child's dramatic play.

If a kindergarten is designed and taught so as to encourage the basic learning modes of the five-year-olds, it is easily adapted to accommodate four-year-olds, who share the same learning modes but who may need a little more direction and a few more limits than their older siblings.

Preschoolers and Choice

To what extent should preschool children choose the activities they will engage in?

The question of how much choice and responsibility children should have for the curriculum is one that has to be asked at all levels of education. One of the criticisms that the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* leveled at high schools is that they offer a "smorgasbord" curriculum that caters to the demands of students rather than the "core" curriculum demanded by educational theory and practice.

The issue of choice always has at least two dimensions. One of these is the freedom of the student to choose

among educational offerings; the other, the depth, variety, and appropriateness of the offerings. In a small college, the student has less freedom of choice than in a large university only because he or she has fewer options to choose from. In the same way, good preschool programs provide children with more freedom than poor ones, in part because they provide more educational choices.

The issue of choice is thus really no different at the preschool level than at other levels of education. There is a very definite core curriculum, a set of skills, concepts, and values that it is desirable for all children to acquire. There are also various "elective" activities, which permit children to follow their own inclinations. The core curriculum of the preschool includes such skills as paying attention, following instructions, taking turns, and completing a task. With respect to knowledge, children should know numbers and letters, the basic colors and forms, and have a substantial passive vocabulary and a good working active vocabulary by the time they leave preschool. They should also have a beginning sense of weights and measures, know basic plants and animals, and have had exposure to music, songs, and rhythmic activities.

The preschool teacher insures that all young children acquire this basic curriculum by encouraging all the children to participate at one time or another in activities where these basic skills and concepts are emphasized. For example, a child who spends too much time in the block corner is encouraged to move to the reading and science area to give other children a chance with the blocks. In this way, the child learns to take turns at the same time that he or she is directed to move on to another curricular area.

So, as at all levels of education, the preschool child's opportunities for choice are limited by the curricular offerings and by the demands of the core curriculum. In a good preschool program, the child has considerable freedom in deciding *when* he or she will pursue a particular activity (curricular area), but much less freedom in deciding *what* curricular areas are available for exploration. The *what* is determined by how the classroom is arranged and by how the teacher encourages children to move from one activity area to another. In short, the way in which the preschool environment is prepared limits the child's choices, as does the teacher, who ensures that each child sample all the activities available.

Does it really matter if a child attends preschool before entering kindergarten?

One way to answer this question is to ask whether it really matters if a child attends elementary school before junior high or junior high before high school.

The analogy is not as absurd as it first appears. Parents who are extraordinarily competent and dedicated and who have both the time and the energy can provide the essentials of formal education to their children at home. It is true, of course, that the more advanced the schooling, the less able the home is to provide equivalent expertise, equipment, and facilities. A parent might come close to duplicating what a nursery school offers much more easily than he or she could duplicate the offerings of, say, a high school.

In the broadest sense, healthy early childhood education is crucial for all children.

If parents possess the competence to provide young children with a variety of learning experiences, with exposure to other children and adults (perhaps by means of neighborhood play groups), along with opportunities for small and large motor play, then home schooling may suffice to prepare children for kindergarten. But if parents do not have the commitment, the time, the energy, and the resources to provide young children with an environment that approaches that of the good early childhood program, then it *does* matter whether a child attends a preschool. And it matters for exactly the same reason that it matters if a parent keeps a child out of elementary school but does nothing educational at home.

The issue then is not whether preschool is important, but rather to what extent home schooling can duplicate what preschool has to offer.

Should public schools get into the business of prekindergarten education?

What I have been trying to argue throughout this article is that early childhood education is part of a continuum that includes elementary and secondary education. There is, after all, a profession of early childhood education. At many universities and colleges, students can receive degrees in early childhood education. The Bank Street School in New York City and the Eliot Pearson Department of Child Study at Tufts near Boston are but two of the best known centers for training early childhood educators. There is a professional organization—the National Association for the Education of Young Children—with a membership of more than 55,000, which offers journals, newsletters, and accreditation procedures.

Early childhood education is just that—education—not glorified babysitting. For early childhood education to function as a legitimate part of public education, however, means that professionals in public education must accept early childhood education as a distinct educational discipline. This does not mean that public education should take full responsibility for all three- and four-year-olds. Since home schooling is more feasible at the younger age levels, parents should have more freedom in this regard. In my view public schooling for three- and four-year-olds should not be mandatory.

Is Preschool Crucial?

On the other hand, with more and more two-career families, fewer parents are available to provide the kind of home schooling that young children need to help them fully realize their abilities. Public school programs, along with privately supported preschool programs, can provide an educational setting for children whose parents cannot provide it at home. Some 23 states already have legislation pending to provide schooling for four-year-olds, so there is a growing

recognition that early childhood education should become a legitimate part of public education.

There are dangers here, however, and that is why some of us in early childhood education have been reluctant to advocate the institutionalization of education at this level. Early childhood education is little understood by officials at higher levels of education. Consequently, the danger is that it will be perceived as little more than a downward extension of elementary education. This is already happening in preschool programs where testing, workbooks, and group drill are now imposed on four- and five-year-olds.

Early childhood education must be taken on its own terms. We do not teach the high school curriculum at the junior high level or the junior high curriculum at the elementary school level, so why in the world should we teach the elementary curriculum at the preschool level?

Yes, early childhood education should become part of public education, but on its own terms. Early childhood education has its own curriculum, its own programs of teacher training, its own methods of evaluation and classroom management. These overlap curriculum, teacher training, evaluation, and classroom management at upper levels of schooling, but they are far from being identical.

Early childhood has been waiting in the wings of education for centuries. It is time for it to come on stage as a full-fledged member of the educational cast. The whole performance can only be enhanced by its addition.

For Further Reading

Early Schooling: The National Debate. Sharon Lynn Kagan and Edward Zigler. Yale University Press, 1987.

Early childhood education experts discuss political, practical, social, economic, and philosophical issues involved in providing out-of-home programs. They also review and evaluate related research.

Engaging the Minds of Young Children: The Project Approach. Lillian G. Katz and S. Chard. Ablex, forthcoming.

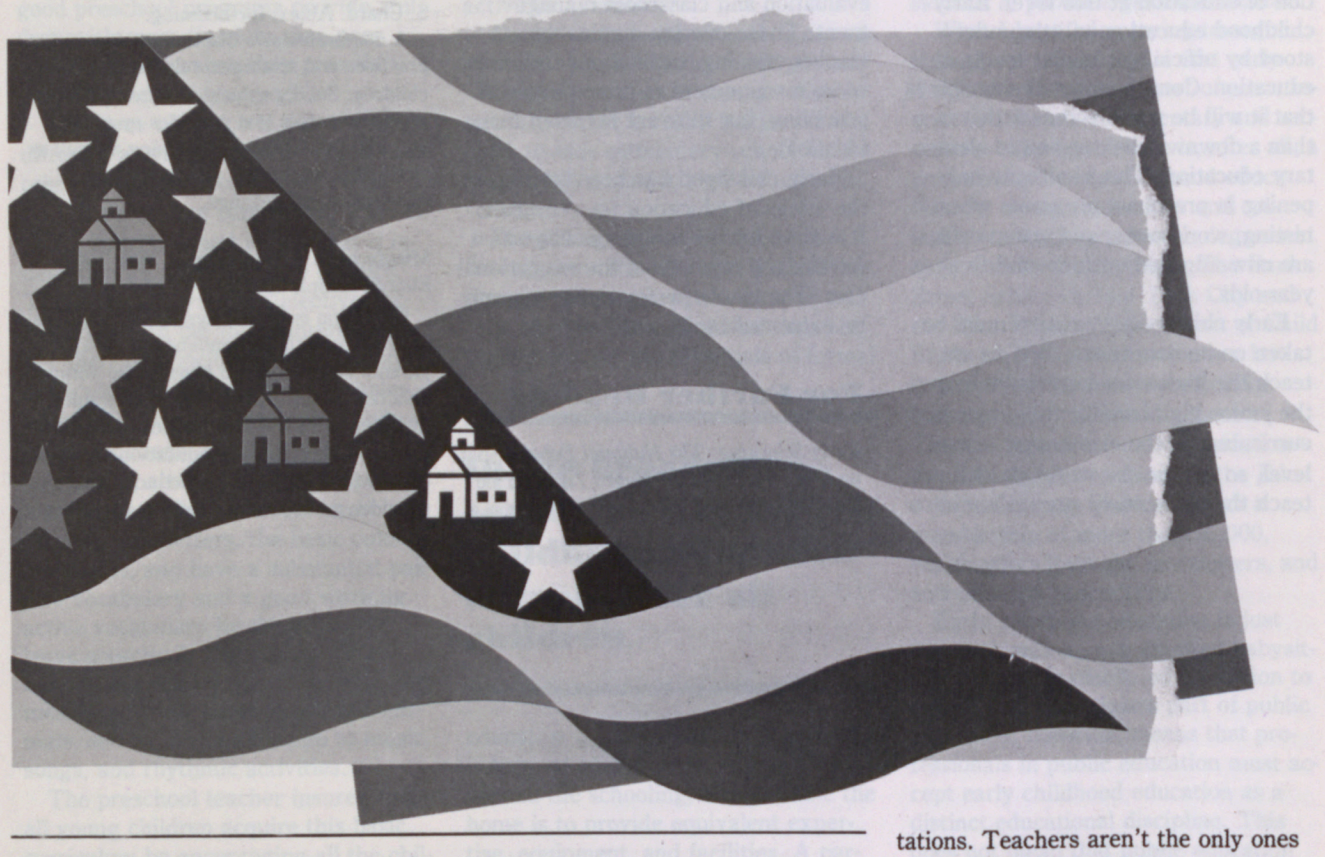
A comprehensive discussion of teaching practices and strategies relating to young children. Solidly grounded in research and experience, this text provides up-to-date material for teachers in training as well as those who work with young children in noneducational settings.

Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk. David Elkind. Knopf, 1987.

Education is not always beneficial. This book deals with the tendency of today's parents and schools to miseducate young children. After dealing with the parental, historical, and social dynamics responsible for this widespread miseducation, the book deals with the risks of miseducation and provides guidelines for healthy education.

Educating for Democracy: Raising Expectations

BY ANN BASTIAN



Economic realities are squeezing the aspirations of our children. But schools *can* make a difference, if they shift their focus from employment to empowerment—of students as well as teachers.

Ann Bastian is a social policy analyst with the New World Foundation in New York. She also works with unions and public interest organizations as a consultant on labor and education issues, and has been a college instructor of 20th century history and American politics for 15 years. Bastian is a co-author of Choosing Equality, *an investigation of education politics and progressive alternatives for school reform in the 1980s.*

When we ask today's teachers to have high expectations for every child, we are asking for more than effective pedagogy. We are asking teachers to fulfill a basic democratic promise of public education. We are asking teachers to act on the principle that every child can learn, every person can contribute to society, every citizen can be empowered by knowledge. High expectations say that everyone has potential, everyone can succeed, everyone counts.

The problem is that teachers and students aren't alone in setting expectations. Teachers aren't the only ones communicating to children what their potentials, choices, and destinies may be. Nor are children the only ones who influence teachers' perceptions about how well they're likely to learn or how far they're likely to go in school.

Messages come from the family, community, and society surrounding the school—and these messages can make it hard for students and teachers to sustain high hopes on their own.

Today, people are paying considerable attention to the impact of home and community inputs—the socialization process—in advancing or retarding school achievement. In fact, an estimated 30 to 50 percent of American children are entering school with levels of deprivation that put them at risk of school failure. The impulse is to look at how we can improve parenting skills, early childhood enrichment programs, and community support

systems to reverse these trends. On the whole, this impulse is well-motivated and may generate an infusion of urgently needed resources.

But it is simply not enough to say that cultures of poverty in the inner city—or changing family structures and shifting social values in the suburbs—are responsible for the levels of underachievement that beset our educational system.

Family stress, social alienation, and cultural dislocation do exist across this country. They erode children's aspirations and they challenge the capacity of schools to motivate achievement, *but they do not exist in a vacuum.*

We need to look at the economic context of education as well as family influences and the school experience itself if we are to accurately assess the problem of expectations, to understand the full challenge facing educators, and to appreciate the high stakes for democracy. To put it another way, expectations are determined not only by personal inputs but by probable outcomes.

The growing gap between school and work—between educational aspirations and employment realities—is a crucial influence lowering expectations, achievement, and democratic values in public education today.

Observers across the political spectrum acknowledge that we are experiencing a profound restructuring of the American economy and the labor market that serves it. Some see a new economic miracle emerging from high-tech and high-finance wizardry, despite recent events on Wall Street. Others of us see a different and disquieting picture. The outlook particularly changes if we turn our sights away from the Silicon Valleys and the life-styles of the rich and famous.

School-to-Work Gap

When we look at the country as a whole, we cannot miss the startling deterioration of our industrial base, of the urban centers and now aging suburbs. We can't escape the nationwide farm crisis and the disintegration of rural communities. A great many youngsters live in economic environments that will not sustain their futures.

When we look at America's socio-economic ladder, we see rapid mobility at the top, particularly for highly skilled professional-technical employees. At the bottom of the ladder, the incidence of poverty has risen by one-third in the 1980s. Both the yuppies and the homeless are hallmarks of this decade.

In between, in the great American middle class, we find mounting insecurity and stagnation. The economic middle is besieged by multiple pressures: global competition, the export of investment capital, de-industrialization, automation, the repeal of union standards, and the return of "laissez-faire" approaches to government.

When we look to job trends, we find some frightening statistics:

- Job growth is occurring, but largely in the low-skill, low-wage sectors of service and trade. In *The Great American Job Machine*, Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison point out that 58 percent of all new jobs created between 1979 and 1984 paid less than $7,000 a year, well below the poverty line.
- Forty percent of the approximately 11.5 million industrial workers displaced by plant closings between 1979 and 1984 have not found new jobs, and of those who have, two-thirds are working at substantially lower wages, according to the U.S. Office of Technology.
- One out of every five jobs in this country is temporary, without basic employee benefits, reports the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).
- In July 1987, with the nation officially at a 6 percent jobless rate, there were 7.2 million unemployed, 1 million discouraged workers who'd given up the job search, and 5.5 million workers involuntarily working short hours, according to the BLS. Among the jobless, fewer than 30 percent were receiving unemployment compensation.

Family stress, social alienation, and cultural dislocation do not exist in a vacuum. We need to look at the economic context of education.

While specific areas of labor shortage exist, due in part to population cycles, these shortages haven't dramatically altered the dead-end nature of job expansion or significantly raised wages and benefits. If anything, shortages will accelerate the drive for automation or overseas production.

Nor can we count on high-tech industries to bail us out. As Rumberger and Levin point out in their analysis for the Center for Educational Research at Stanford University, high-tech firms will provide only 3 to 8 percent of job growth in the next decade, and high-tech occupations will amount to only 6 percent of all new jobs.

To put it simply, we live in an economic hourglass—a time when the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle class is getting squeezed.

Youth are particular victims of these polarizing trends, because they are entering the labor market just as the middle rungs of the ladder are dropping out. Youth unemployment rates are three times the national average. In the inner cities and many rural areas, youth unemployment exceeds 50 percent. The statistics represent millions of low-income and minority youth who will be marginal to the labor force their entire lives. They are victims of both the overall shrinkage of economic opportunity and ongoing patterns of racial discrimination and gender segregation.

Prospects are also dimming for the sons and daughters of working class families. Bluestone and Harrison note that working class youth are moving into the dead-end job sectors at very high rates, while their entry rates into middle and high status employment are declining. Even college-educated youth face tougher odds—over 50 percent of new graduates will enter non-professional jobs outside their fields of study. The vast majority of working young adults will not match the comfortable life-styles their parents achieved in an era of U.S. economic supremacy and expansion.

Beyond the barriers to employment and the declining material rewards of work, there is also evidence that many jobs are becoming more de-skilled and alienating. New technology creates an initial increase in skill requirements for some jobs, but it can also produce a reduction in skill requirements for others, especially as mechanization proceeds.

Job Alienation

This effect is well-illustrated by the fate of the computer programmer, an occupation that has gone from the glamorous front lines of high technology to the tedious backrooms in 10 short years. In many more cases, computerization and electronic communication will be used to increase the specialization, repetition, and isolation of job duties, rather than expanding job variety, initiative, and interaction.

Moreover, young people may accurately perceive the world of work as personally hostile and de-humanizing. Workplaces are not democratic organizations concerned primarily with human potentials and the inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness. Workplaces are governed by the bottom line of material productivity, usually measured by profit rates or production quotas (even test scores). The overwhelming majority of workplaces operate under a command structure, with hierarchical levels of authority, autonomy, and status, where the Bill of Rights gets about as far as the parking lot.

Of course, unions, where they function to give workers a voice, can promote greater measures of economic democracy. But unions represent less than 20 percent of today's workforce, and they're weakest in the sectors that are most rapidly expanding. And, truth be told, American unions have in too many instances grown hide-bound and defensive. Beset by global competition, employer assault, government hostility, and a changing workforce, the American labor movement has not yet found effective ways of fighting back or of capturing the spirit of a new generation of workers.

Things are not so different on the management side of the fence. Despite a lot of fanfare on the MBA circuit, very few companies have embraced the "quality of work life" (QWL) approach to mangement, emphasizing worker input and job satisfaction. And very few QWL experiments have gone beyond cosmetic changes in the traditionally autocratic style of American corporate management. Indeed, a number of QWL plans have functioned primarily as union-busting attempts.

What does this picture of the employment future tell American educators? Obviously, a lot of the news is bad, and some of it's going to get worse. On the other hand, the clearer we are about the realities we're up against, the more strategically we can direct our responses.

Reality #1: The polarization of job futures, and the increasingly alienated forms of labor awaiting most students, ostensibly gives lie to the democratic ideals of opportunity and equality we have vested in education.

To put it simply, we live in a time when the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle class is getting squeezed.

The Squeeze on Schools

We're caught in the bind that education means more for a few, but means less for many in terms of standards of living, meaningful work, social influence, and self-determination. The message that millions of students are getting from the world of work is: learn for what?

Reality #2: The unavoidable result is that, outside of upwardly mobile communities, schools are increasingly hard-pressed to motivate any large portion of their students through career aspiration or the work ethic. The school-to-work gap is growing.

Reality #3: Schools don't have to mirror existing socio-economic conditions; schools don't have to be driven by market imperatives. This is fortunate in light of the first two realities. It's true that schools are never immune from economic influences and never escape the pressure to serve the competitive demands of a stratified economic structure. It's also true that in stressful or uncertain economic times, there will inevitably be a struggle for the soul of schooling—a battle over making education more elitist or more democratic to meet the challenges of the future.

Schools and Change

But it's equally true, and important to remember in such times, that our schools are public institutions, supported in the public interest and open to public governance. If we fight to uphold the democratic mission of public education, in the face of anti-democratic economic trends, schools can be countervailing institutions and even springboards for social progress. Schools can provide models of democratic experience that alter our expectations—not only of children's potentials, but of society's potentials as well.

Many of these models are already at hand: in school systems that have successfully integrated, in schools that produce high rates of achievement despite high rates of disadvantage, in schools that bring parents and community members together with teachers to diminish the risks and pressures afflicting youth. The Comer Process, a collaborative effort to re-design the inner-city schools of New Haven, is one outstanding example of how schools can begin to deliver equity with excellence—and transform aspiration along the way. The Committee for Economic Development's *Children in Need* includes case studies of the Comer Process and similar efforts to transform public schools.

We know that democratic schooling can transcend elitist barriers—the real questions are, how do we spread the lessons? Clearly, some of the answers have to come through the political process, from the national agendas we advocate and the kind of leadership we choose. But some of the answers will come from the school reform movement—from inside local schools.

In *Choosing Equality: The Case for Democratic Schooling*, my co-authors

and I identified three levels of school improvement that relate educating for democracy to educating for the world of work. These levels could be called: coping with realities, challenging realities, and defining new realities.

At each level there is the underlying premise that we can raise expectations for all students, and for all teachers, if the bottom-line for schooling is empowerment, not employment. As we enter the 21st century, schools should not be training children for a given occupation or a single skill. They should be preparing children to apply knowledge, to solve problems, to make choices, and to participate in setting priorities.

These are the generic skills and disciplines young people need to lead productive lives—as self-directed individuals, as family members and role models, as neighbors and as citizens—regardless of their job status. Not coincidentally, these are also the skills young people need to survive in the world of work, to influence the terms of employment, and to reassess our nation's economic policies.

Response #1: One urgent task for public education is to insure universal literacy, which is the minimal condition for participation in tomorrow's labor market. This means getting resources to illiterate parents as well as to children at risk. It should be clear, however, that basic skills for today's labor market include much more than functional literacy, simple computation, or narrow job training.

Most young people now entering the workforce will have a number of different jobs across their working lives. Technologies will change at an accelerating pace, opportunities will shift across economic sectors, and most specific skills training will occur on the job.

Survival Skills

To maximize their chances for survival in a rapidly shifting and diversified job market, students need learning approaches that enhance intellectual as well as vocational flexibility. Students need schooling that emphasizes critical thinking and reasoning capacities, and the ability to interact with peers and teachers in tackling unfamiliar material. Meaningful work experience or vocational preparation programs should be continuously integrated with an academic program. Counseling needs to be holistic too, encouraging personal as well as career development.

This approach may seem like common sense, as the National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education suggests. However, it is not common practice. The rule is to promote narrow vocational training, increasingly in trades or technologies that are obsolete. We have also widely succumbed to early tracking based on presumed labor market destinies, to test-driven and quantifiable curriculums, and to the mastery of highly segmented and specific skills. School counseling, which is chronically understaffed, offers too little, too late, in too many separate pieces.

In stressful or uncertain economic times, there will inevitably be a struggle for the soul of schooling.

Most importantly, we should not forget that the foundation for a decent school-to-work transition is a decent school culture—not just an extra program or a saleable skill. An alien or hostile classroom environment, or an attitude of benign neglect, can be far more destructive than the absence of a computer science program, although computer science is needed too.

Recently, the Council for Economic Development has done outstanding work at the national level to link issues of job readiness with broader school improvement strategies, including teacher empowerment. Opportunities for educators to argue this case will multiply at the state level and should be seized.

The essential point here is that we can raise children's expectations for the future by giving them more than the tools for a specific job. Schools can give students the tools to adapt and advance in the job market, along with the confidence they need to succeed.

Economic Literacy

Response #2: I'm an unabashed advocate for totally overhauling the ways we introduce students to the world of work. We need a program for economic literacy built into the social studies core curriculum. The exploration of work should start in the primary grades, when children are fascinated by the mysterious claims of work on the adults around them and understand the intrinsic dignity of all kinds of occupations, apart from salary and status.

By middle school and high school, as students themselves encounter the vocational sorting process, they should be learning how the labor market functions. What determines supply and demand? How are wages and benefits set? What barriers are posed by discrimination, segregation, and stereotyping? How has it changed over the years? Why has it changed?

Students should be learning about options across the entire career cycle, particularly about family–career choices and pressures. Students need first-hand exposure to corporate organization, management techniques, and personnel practices. Students need first-hand exposure to labor rights, union organization, collective bargaining, government regulation, protective legislation, workplace health and safety standards.

The world of work is a world of many conflicts—particularly conflicts over the inequities of wealth, power, health, and security—that accompany our market system. Some of the most important conditions affecting students, their families, and communities have to do with plant closings, farm foreclosures, pay equity and comparable worth, job tenure, workplace hazards and toxic waste disposal, maternity leave and child care. Even NFL idols go on strike.

These are the kitchen table topics that children learn about at home, but often without a sense of how broad the problems are, or where they come from, or how they can be resolved. Schools shy away from these issues because they are genuine conflicts: they're always controversial, often

divisive, and never value-free.

On the other hand, schools do tackle controversial and value-laden issues when the crisis is intense enough, when the public interest is at stake. When we're confronted by teen suicides or drug abuse, by teen pregnancy or the AIDS epidemic, we turn to the public schools and live with the tensions that ensue.

Let me suggest that the school-to-work breakdown presents just as critical an assault on the well-being of youth and the condition of society. If we want to prepare students for the real world of work, we have to help them investigate its real problems. My own experience in tackling these controversies in the classroom suggests two approaches.

First, social studies curriculums need to include labor history and the role of social movements in shaping economic standards. History provides crucial reference points for understanding current workplace and economic conflicts, and for understanding how social progress is achieved. Distance and hindsight can also make the lessons fuller and sharper. Oral history projects are an especially fertile way to engage labor and social history, and they can connect students to the work experience of family and community members.

Second, we need to revitalize the study of current events, including labor events, from a local strike to the most recent unemployment statistics to the emissions from a nearby chemical plant. Topical discussions about what students see happening in front of them can point to the underlying public issues of job creation, labor rights, and economic vitality. Here too, classroom activity can be combined with field investigation, such as on-site interviews or public hearings.

If the teaching profession can claim more creative time and classroom autonomy, as many school reform experts are urging, it could do much to reshape the messages students receive from the labor market and workplace. Not all those messages will be pleasant or encouraging, but they can be relevant and interesting. Students need tools for understanding employment obstacles as well as opportunities. They need tools for understanding how injustice is challenged and how progress is negotiated.

High expectations can't be sustained unless they're also realistic expectations. The trick we need to teach is that realities change and people can change them.

Educating for Citizenship

Response #3: The essence of my argument is that schools can best counteract economic polarization and workplace hierarchy by educating students for citizenship. There is, of course, a certain Catch-22 in this proposition.

Students who see themselves as powerless, alienated, and cynical in the world of work also feel that way in a political process dominated by money and in a mass culture dominated by conspicuous consumption and commercial relationships. It's not any easier to motivate learning through the model of the good citizen than it is through the model of the productive worker when both models are visibly contradicted by events.

If we want to prepare students for the real world of work, we have to help them investigate its real problems.

There are, nonetheless, large and small steps schools can take to convey the potentials for personal and social empowerment that lie in the democratic process. The most important way to teach democratic values in the face of negative examples, political or economic, is for schools to function democratically themselves—to offer children both positive example and first-hand experience.

In my view, the schools that best convey democratic values are organized as communities rather than as factories. Their school cultures put a premium on interaction, participation, initiative, and collaboration—not only between teachers and students, but among teachers and students. They measure success by mastery and individual progress, not by competition based on winners and losers. They broaden the mainstream to include the full spectrum of needs children bring to school. They respect diversity and explore it. Teachers have the central role in a collegial governance system, and parents are an active element in setting and implementing school goals.

But however one imagines the ideal school culture, the underlying point is that schools send messages about the value of democracy through the relationships they establish, quite apart from the formal democratic values they espouse. As we debate the directions for school reform in the next decade, including professional reform, we can't ignore these qualitative issues.

It's also time to take a long look at civics education, which has pervasively become the lowest form of life in the social studies curriculum. We need to find hands-on ways that students can learn that the democratic process offers more than passive choices of ratification or periodic choices of representation. Democracy is also about participation, it's about taking collective action and setting new agendas, it's about making choices from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

I think the most important single advance we can make in civics education—and in rebuilding the connection between school, community, and work—is to establish public service programs that place high school and even middle school students in helping roles outside the school. Youth today, affluent or poor, need the experience of service, of using their labor and their judgment to make a difference to others. They need the sense of mastery that comes from initiative and intervention. They need the social awareness and sense of possibility that comes from personal involvement and commitment.

Educating for citizenship, by example and by practice, means that children can raise their expectations for a democratic future in at least three ways: they perceive that realities change, they learn that they can contribute to change, and they begin to

envision what new realities can be. As this generation of youth enters the world of work, it will sorely need a new vision for economic development and a belief in its capacity to restructure the terms and conditions of employment.

Schools Can't Do It All

Reality #4: I have argued that schools can make a difference in filling the school-to-work gaps: the gaps in expectations, the gaps in gratification, the gaps in democratic values. I've also asserted that schools would make a bigger difference if we had different schools, if we built our models for reform on schools that have best fulfilled their democratic mission, and if we matched our professed concern with adequate and equitable resources.

Having said all this, I must add that schools can't succeed, for *all* students, unless some other priorities change as well. This society needs to invest in its youth beyond the schoolhouse. We need to invest in the wellness and security of children before they reach school. We need to invest in decent jobs, in healthy communities, and in students' cultural enrichment after they graduate as young adults.

Educators need to take responsibility for what schools can do; indeed, we need to overload the system with success. But we also need to demand accountability for the other variables, the elements of social and economic justice that fulfill high expectations, reward personal achievement, and produce more equitable outcomes. In economic as well as in educational spheres, we need to embrace John Dewey's precept: the solution to the problems of democracy is more democracy.

For Further Reading

For an overview of the tension between democratic and economic missions of schooling:

Choosing Equality: The Case for Democratic Schooling. Ann Bastian, Norm Fruchter, Marilyn Gittell, Colin Greer, and Kenneth Haskins, Temple University Press, 1986.

Schooling and Work in the Democratic State. Martin Carnoy and Henry M. Levin. Stanford University Press, 1985.

For an understanding of current employment and technological trends:

"Educational Requirements for New Technologies." Henry M. Levin and Russell W. Rumberger, The Center for Educational Research at Stanford University, 1986.

"Forecasting the Impact of New Technologies on the Future Job Market." Russell W. Rumberger and Henry M. Levin. The Center for Educational Research at Stanford University, 1984.

"The Great American Job Machine." Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison. Report of the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress, December 1986.

For recommendations on school improvement strategies and instructional issues addressing the school-to-work connection:

Investing in Our Children: Business and the Public Schools. Committee for Economic Development, Research and Policy Committee, 477 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10022, Sept. 1985.

Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged, Committee for Economic Development, Research and Policy Committee, Sept. 1987.

The Unfinished Agenda. National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education, Washington, D.C., December 1984.

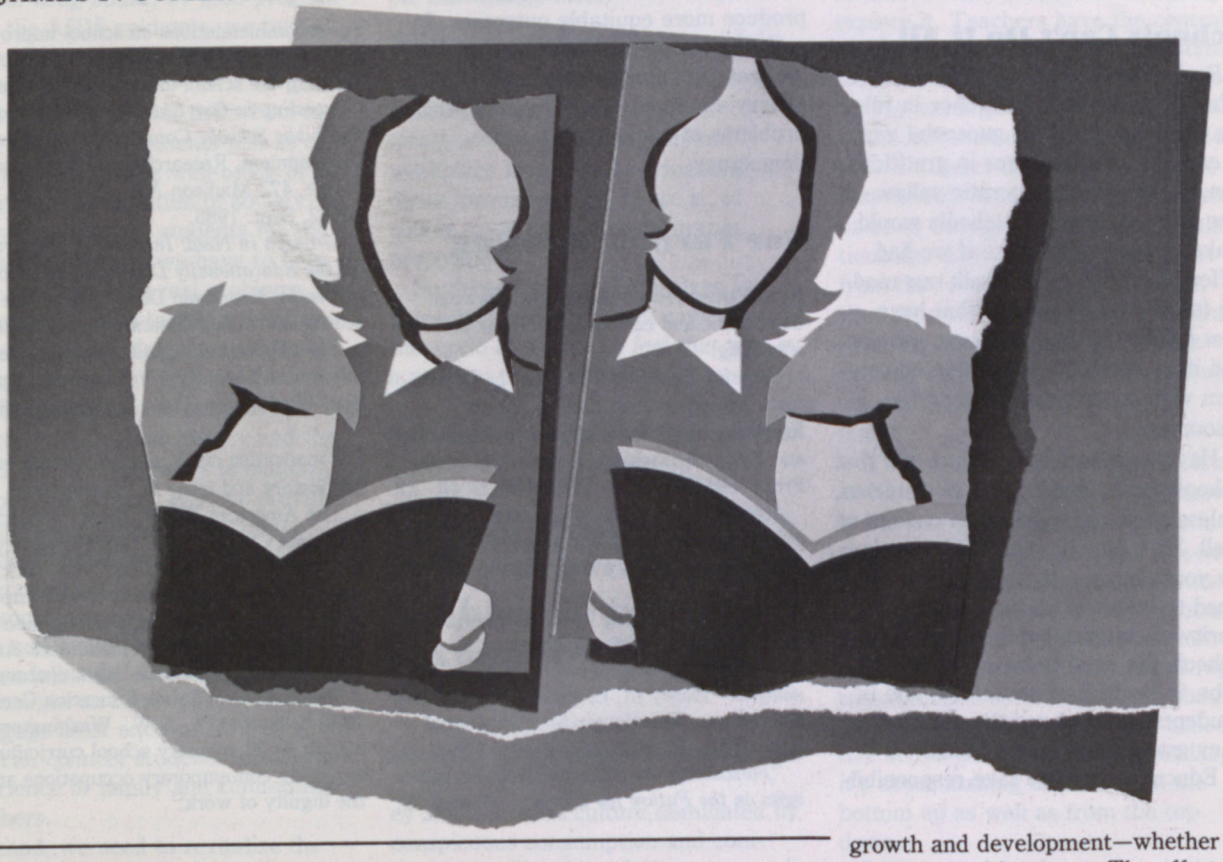
For innovative curriculum resources on labor history and labor in the economy:

The American Social History Project, Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 33 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036: A seven-part series of videotape presentations portraying working men and women, slave and free, in landmark American labor struggles of the 19th century.

The American Labor Education Center, 1835 Kilbourne Pl., N.W., Washington, DC 20010: An elementary school curriculum exploring contemporary occupations and the dignity of work.

Is 'Parenting' Essential To Good Teaching?

BY JAMES P. COMER M.D.



Nothing is more important to success in schools than the quality of relationships between and among students, teachers, and parents. Yet many reformers treat learning as a purely mechanical process.

James Comer is Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry and director of the School Development Program at the Yale Child Study Center and associate dean of the Yale University School of Medicine in New Haven. He has written extensively on child development and behavior, school improvement, and the education of minority students. His most recent book, Maggie's American Dream *(1988), is his family biography in the context of the Afro-American experience.*

The idea that teachers are "parent surrogates" for their students doesn't sit well with many people, though most find the notion of teachers as child developers less troublesome. But when we consider the fact that good child rearing and child development practices promote academic learning, the notion of teacher as parent surrogate becomes logical. In fact, many of the techniques and conditions required for successful parenting in families are also required for successful teaching in schools.

All adults involved with children either help or thwart children's growth and development—whether we like it, intend it, or not. The effort to limit the role of the teacher and the school to academics is one of the primary reasons America's great experiment in education—the effort to educate more than the intellectual elite and economically privileged—has been less successful than it might have been. This limitation has been one of the reasons that so many students drop out and only about 20 percent actually thrive in our schools.

Teaching and learning are too often considered mechanical processes. This view, reinforced by the emergence and growth of technology, sees student minds as computers. Teachers input information; students process the input and respond.

Despite the lessons of John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, and others who have recognized the importance of feelings and relationships in fostering student

growth and development, this mechanical view of the learning process has prevailed. It was reinforced by the educational reform movement of the 1920s and '30s—and the resulting changes in educational standards, school organization and functioning, and teacher training.

The cognitive sciences and experimental and quantitative research gained acceptance and prestige during the 1950s—to the detriment of the affective sciences and clinical, field, and qualitative research. This development contributed to the widespread perception of learning as a mechanical cognitive function—as opposed to a cognitive *and* affective process that involves relationships and development.

In 1957, the Russians sent Sputnik into space—and the United States panicked. Our schools tried to do even more of what they were already doing—teachers teaching and students learning in a mechanical fashion. But gradually, study by study, a new theme emerged. Teachers, parents, and students alike began pointing to the importance of the quality of relationships among everybody involved in the educational enterprise. Those most intimately involved in our schools were telling us that these relationships receive little attention—and as a result are often not conducive to student learning and development.

"*They* don't care" is the number one complaint heard from student dropouts. Teachers complain about behavior problems and the lack of student motivation. Parents complain that they feel unwanted by schools—except when they're needed to control their children. These are all relationship issues.

The 'Good Old Days'

Nonetheless, school reform reports over the past few years have reemphasized the same issues addressed in the 1920s and '30s—educational standards, school organization and functioning, and teacher training. More than half a century later, educational reform is still paying little attention to relationships, to the role of the affect in learning.

Our public schools are under mounting pressure. The U.S. economy, and our standard of living as a nation, will deteriorate unless the majority of students receive an adequate education. And that education must do more than enable students to earn "acceptable" scores on standardized tests. The schools must prepare students to be responsible family members and citizens of their communities and our society

Educational policymakers must learn the lessons of the past. Many students will not be motivated to learn, to master academic material, while troublesome underlying relationship feelings and conditions are at play. Our schools cannot provide educational excellence until the policy makers make it possible for teachers and school people to again serve as parent surrogates.

All adults involved with children either help or thwart children's development—whether we like it, intend it, or not.

Prior to the mid-1950s, most teachers were parent surrogates without ever being fully aware of it. Before this time, transportation was slow, television nonexistent. There was only modest movement of people and ideas in and out of communities. Teachers were an integral part of the community in which they lived and worked. They went to the same churches or synagogues as their students. They shopped in the same stores or used the same post office. Some walked to school hand in hand with their students. They sometimes engaged in play and leisure time activities with the families of their students.

As a result of the limitations on travel and communication, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and other adult authority figures were the "source of all truth" for children in their early developmental years. These significant adults generally held a consensus about what was right and wrong, good and bad.

A set of attitudes, values, and ways dominated individual communities and were generally accepted by children and adults alike. This situation limited change and free expression. At the same time, it made the environment very predictable, provided children with a sense of belonging and place—even when "your place" was not acceptable by today's standards. All of these conditions created a local sense of community—of which the school was a natural part. This allowed for a transfer of authority from home to school in a way that permitted parents and teachers to support children's growth and development.

When I was in elementary school in the 1940s, I went on a shopping expedition to the A&P store every Friday with my parents and siblings. I can't remember a week that we did not encounter someone from the school—the custodian, principal, teacher, school clerk. There was always an exchange of information about how we were doing in school, what was expected of us, and what to do if we didn't meet those expectations. The positive relationship between my parents and school people—and the probability of a weekly report—made it difficult for me to do anything short of live up to the expressed expectations.

Learning at home that prepares children for school initially takes place through imitation of, identification with, and internalization of the attitudes, values, and ways of parents, family, and selected friends, kin, and social institutions. A positive relationship between home and school allows children to imitate, identify with, and internalize the attitudes, values, and ways of school people. This makes it possible for school people to counsel, guide, and motivate students to grow along all the crucial developmental pathways—social–interactive, psycho–emotional, moral, speech and language, intellectual–cognitive–academic.

I don't remember much from the college algebra course I took in high school. But the teacher was also the dean of students, and he once adjudicated a student election in a way that was fair despite a great deal of pressure to do otherwise. His behavior was a model of fairness and integrity

that lives with me today. Modern technology has replaced typesetting by hand. But my print shop teacher remains important to me because in casual conversation with several of us he pointed out that most of us will never be Einsteins, Franklin Roosevelts, or Joe Louises; that the important thing in our lives was to prepare ourselves to be able to take care of self and family in a responsible way.

I haven't had much use for high school Latin over the years. And as mischievous teens we were amused that our teacher appeared to be on familiar terms with Julius Caesar, Marc Anthony, and other figures of ancient Rome. But I was also motivated to learn Latin—despite the fact that it was a dead language—because of our teacher's enthusiasm for the subject. When I complained about the slowness of the democratic process in dealing with obvious injustices, my government teacher said, "The wheels of democracy grind slowly, but they grind." His observation alerted me to the complexity of human systems and contributed to my eventually becoming a student of behavior and social systems.

The ways my teachers worked and interacted with us were very much like the ways of concerned parents. The attention they gave to our nonacademic thoughts, fears, concerns, and problems did not detract from teaching the basics. In fact, it was their concern, interest, and enthusiasm that motivated many of us to learn the academic material—often when it had no intrinsic or obvious value, interest, or even benefit, other than a grade. Cognitive skills were honed and the confidence and discipline to learn were gained because of positive relationships—first with parents, then with teachers in school.

Societal Transition

After the 1940s, our society began to change very rapidly and dramatically. Today airplanes move people in half a day from coast to coast and continent to continent—distances that took weeks and months to travel less than a hundred years ago. Work is less often local, and play is less often communal. Modern roads, cars, and rapid transportation allow people to live long distances from where they work. These conditions decrease the interactions among, as well as the power and influence of, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and other local authority figures. There's a concommitant decrease in the predictability of the environment and children's sense of trust, belonging, and place.

Television now brings attitudes, values, and ways from around the world directly to children without the censorship or sanctions of the important adults around them. Sometimes what they observe is in conflict with what their parents are trying to teach them. Children can listen to differences of opinion about what is right and wrong on almost every newscast. There is less of a single truth and way to understand and behave agreed on by important adult authority figures.

Education policymakers ignored the changes in communities, relationships, and behavior brought about by science and technology after World War II.

There are now many truths in competition with each other. And television bombards young people with more information than ever before. Human shortcomings and frailties are revealed to children at very early ages. "Dynasty," "Dallas," and other television programs present young people with the "nitty gritty" of adult life, including appropriate and inappropriate sexual expression. And some children, because of working or careless parents, are able to watch "Debbie Does Dallas" and other pornographic films.

Nonetheless, children are no more mature than they were 40 years ago—even if they appear to be because they have more information. Our children's exposure to a complex world increases their need for adult guidance and support to integrate the information into their developing psyches. Children need adults to help them learn what, when, and how to act on the information they receive, and develop the controls to do so appropriately.

The Schools Adjust . . .

Children need more adult guidance than in the past—but for many reasons they receive less. Families with two working parents are now the norm instead of the exception—and children spend less time with their parents. There's more family stress, conflict, and divorce. There are more young, single parents with inadequate incomes rearing children. There is less extended family, social network, and community support for parents and children.

And our children don't receive adult guidance and support in the schools. School organization and management are designed to facilitate a focus on academic content rather than to promote desirable staff–student interactions and adequate student growth and development. The organization is usually hierarchical and departmentalized. Management is usually authoritarian and top-down in execution. Teachers and administrators are not trained to appreciate the way school organization and management impact the behavior of staff, parents, and students.

Most teachers and administrators who work well with students and promote their development do so on the basis of intuitive knowledge and skills, not through knowledge they gained in applied child development courses in their pre-service or in-service training. There aren't many such courses. All of these conditions make it difficult for school people to serve as parent surrogates—to help their students learn to manage a more complex age and school environment, to help them succeed and stay in school.

Education theorists and policy makers ignored the changes in communities, relationships, and behavior brought about by science and technology after World War II. The schools adjusted to societal changes by concentrating almost exclusively on the new academic demands. Policy makers also ignored the fact that schools

would now be expected to educate children who in the past usually dropped out, but still found a place in the labor force.

Those children who are provided with a good developmental experience prior to school, whose parents' attitudes, values, and ways are similar to those of the school, and whose parents make a conscious effort to support the activities of the school, are the children most likely to succeed in school. This was as true 40 years ago as it is today. But young people who didn't succeed in school 40 years ago could leave. They could find a job that would enable them to take care of themselves and their families, feel rewarded for doing so, and be motivated to be responsible family members and citizens of their communities and the society.

Today when young people drop out of school, they are usually embarking on a downhill course in life, with reduced chances of meeting their adult responsibilities. In short, a higher level of academic achievement and social development is required to carry out adult tasks today than has ever been required before in the history of the world.

Because of the complexity of today's world, all students need more support from school people than in the past. But a disproportionate number of the children who will not do well in school are from low-income families, families under excessive stress, or families with lifestyles very different from the expectations of the school. And a disproportionate number of these families are from the minority groups that have had the most traumatic experiences in this country—Native Americans, Hispanics, and Blacks. These groups differ from others in that they have experienced the most cultural discontinuity and destruction of their organizing and stabilizing institutions and practices, as well as forced exclusion from education and other developmental opportunities.

After the 1940s, education increasingly became the ticket of admission to living wage jobs. Minorities, greatly undereducated prior to that time, were increasingly closed out of primary job market opportunities and locked into the lowest level of the work force. Minorities had always been relegated to the bottom of the occupational ladder in this country. But through the first half of this century, many minority families in rural areas, with strong religious and cultural support systems functioned reasonably well despite low incomes.

By the mid-1950s, rural minority families were being pushed off the land and into urban centers by technological and economic developments. These families, which had previously functioned reasonably well, began to function less well. They came under social stress of all kinds and became increasingly unable to give their children the kind of preschool experiences that would allow them to achieve well in school. These children need the teacher-as-parent surrogate—in alliance with their own parents—more than any other group of children. Unfortunately, due to our history and culture, these are the children least likely to receive parenting in the schools.

Children under social stress need the teacher as parent surrogate—in alliance with their own parents—more than other children.

How Schools Fail

Differences between home and school—whether of class, race, income, or culture—always create potential conflict. Today, because the school is no longer a natural part of the community, the alliance between home and school must be forged if it is to exist at all. And wherever there is a disparity of power between groups who must relate to each other to achieve a goal, the group with the most power must make the greatest effort to overcome the real and potential obstacles to creating a desirable relationship. The effort must be made with good will and skill in order to avoid condescension and other attitudes that will only exacerbate the conflict.

Children who have not received an adequate developmental experience prior to school—for whatever reasons—often present themselves in ways that cause school people to view them as willfully "bad" and of limited ability. A common response is to punish such youngsters or to have low expectations for them. But because societal conditions today don't provide the kind of absolute authority schools had in the past, students often fight back in acting-out or disruptive ways. The staff often then makes an even stronger effort to control the behavior without responding to the underlying problems with relationships and development of the children. This makes the situation worse. In addition, school staff—like all of us—want to be successful in their work. Children who don't appear to be ready, motivated, or trying to learn make it difficult for school staff to experience success.

School staff and students are often unable to develop the kind of relationships that will allow emotional attachment and bonding, imitation, identification, and internalization of the attitudes, values, and ways of the school that are necessary to promote adequate academic learning. Many students withdraw, lose confidence, or adjust in other ways that limit their academic performance. In turn, staff attitudes about the behavior and ability of the students are confirmed. Teachers are then less likely to be positive parent surrogates. These negative interactions lead to a spectrum of conditions from controlled and quiet but academically underachieving schools, to chaotic and academically underachieving schools.

Parents are often asked to get involved in meaningful ways with schools only after their children are in trouble or not learning well. Because they don't have natural interactions with school staff, parents are often suspicious and distrustful before there are problems and convinced that their feelings were justified after problems arise. Some parents have difficult memories and ambivalent feelings about schools themselves. And those

under great stress, with their own personal problems and failures, often view the school problems of their children as yet another failure. Thus, many parents stay away from schools or interact with school people in angry, defensive, and confrontational ways.

Negative Relations

School staff—doing their best and not appreciated—often respond in understandably defensive ways. Staff people sometimes say and feel, "The parents don't care." They offer in evidence the fact that the parents don't keep appointments or attend school functions—while at the same time they blame the school for their children's problems. In fact, most parents do care—but they have difficulty interacting with the school.

When parents are unhappy, and students are not behaving or learning adequately, conflict often develops among school staff. The social workers, psychologists, and special education teachers are expected to "fix" the children's problems—but often feel those problems are created or exacerbated by the classroom teachers. Some teachers want to have more influence in the management of the school in order to address problems. Others simply want the administrator to get tough and do his or her job—punishing the badness out of the kids.

The negative cycle intensifies. Disappointment and conflict consume energy and get in the way of gratifying professional experiences. Hopelessness and despair can lead to apathy, poor staff performance, and criticism from within and without the school. Additional problems based on racial, class, cultural, and economic differences often arise.

The traditional organization of schools doesn't allow the staff to work together to overcome problems. Departmentalization in middle and high schools further separates and fragments staffs. Even in schools that serve students from better educated families under less economic stress—but where students still need guidance and support—the school organization makes it difficult for staff to develop desirable relationships with students, to serve as parent surrogates.

We cannot turn back the clock and return to "the good old days." In fact, it's necessary to keep in mind that many students from all socioeconomic groups didn't achieve to the level of their academic potential in the good old days. But we can reorganize schools so that staff can support social and emotional growth—and in turn, academic learning.

A reasonable consensus is needed to accomplish the schools' mission. This consensus can't be mandated as it was in the past—it doesn't exist in our schools or our communities. A mechanism must be created through which school building leadership can create desirable relationships and develop a consensus consistent with school system goals that will allow staff and parents to support the development of students—and involve students in their own self-development and learning.

Differences between home and school—whether of class, race, income, or culture—always create potential conflict.

In my initial intervention research work in two schools in New Haven, Connecticut, we observed many of the most severe problems described above. We realized that no single group—parents, teachers, administrators, students—was at fault. We recognized that no single intervention—curriculum change, behavior modification method, physical environment improvement—would make a significant and sustained difference.

The problem was that the schools were addressing new problems and opportunities in old and now ineffective ways. The interaction between home and school, among school staff, and between staff and students created a climate that made it difficult for the staff to form an alliance with parents and serve as parent surrogates.

We created a governance and management group, led by the principal, made up of representatives of the key adult groups in the school—teachers, pupil personnel staff, teacher assistants, and parents. This group encouraged the interaction between critical authority figures—the kind of interaction that took place in yesterday's communities in natural ways. This mechanism decreased distrust and alienation between home and school. Parents and staff realized their mutual interest and developed a sense of program ownership and responsibility, along with the principal. Effective communication and planning became possible.

The governance and management group eventually developed a comprehensive building plan that focused on creating a desirable climate of social relationships in both the entire school and the academic program. The objectives and strategies of the plan dictated the kind of staff development that took place at the building level. And systematic assessment of the outcomes in both the behavioral and academic areas allowed the group, with the support of the entire staff and parent community, to modify the school program as indicated.

We also brought the social worker, psychologist, special education teacher, and other support staff together as a group. They continued to provide service to individual children and families. But the emphasis was shifted from responding to problem behaviors to preventing them. A member of this group served on the governance and management team and helped team members, and the entire staff, think of children as underdeveloped, under stress, or with skills that work outside of school, but not in school. They helped the staff see children as having modifiable behaviors—not as being simply bad, "dumb," or of limited intelligence.

School as Community

The staff responded by helping the children modify undesirable behaviors—as good parents do. They received parental support because the parents were involved in the program to help establish a good school climate. Pot luck suppers, fashion shows, book fairs, workshops by teachers for parents, and a variety of other academic and social projects re-

stored the trust between home and school. These activities created an alliance that permitted both staff and parents to parent. The program brought the parents into the school during good times rather than bad.

The decreased behavior problems in the school led to decreased conflict among school staff. The more desirable interaction between staff and students increased parent and community support of the schools. This in turn increased staff energy, hope for student success, and for professional success for themselves. There was more time for teaching and planning. In such an environment, teacher-student attachment and bonding, imitation, identification, and internalization of school ways by students could take place.

Eventually it became possible to tailor the co-curricular activities—arts, athletics, social skills—and the academic curriculum of the school to the specific needs of the children. The schools went from being the lowest achieving in the city to within the top five with no change in the 99 percent Black, almost all poor make-up of the student population. Staff and parents, planning together, were able to develop a number of programs that worked in a changed climate of interaction that probably would not have worked in a climate in which the emphasis was on teaching academic material with no attention to the quality of relationships. Teachers were able to discourage undesirable behavior and encourage desirable behavior, and to respond to the thoughts, fears, concerns, and problems of the students much in the way of parents.

One of the single parents from the school called her 10-year-old son's teacher because the child had left home upset, it was very late, and he hadn't returned. The teacher went to the school and found the child huddled at the front door in the dark and the cold. The teacher started his search at the school because he knew it had come to mean support and security to the youngster. While the school does not want to take over the role of the parent, creating a climate that permits such strong positive feelings allows the staff to influence positive student behavior and motivate academic learning.

We're taking the same general intervention approach in a New Haven middle and high school as we took in the elementary schools. Our work at the secondary level is too recent to report results. But it's also possible to create activities related to the curriculum and student learning that bring staff, parents, and students together in ways that support the growth of middle and high school students. The specific ways this can occur must be developed at the building level because each school is different, with different needs and opportunities, assets, and problems.

Positive outcomes are possible in certain instances without changing the traditional organization of the schools. Creative and charismatic leaders can create desirable home–school relationships, and some gifted teachers are able to help children grow and develop even in difficult school situations. But such positive situations often "fall apart" when the unusual leader or gifted teacher leaves. And many more students can be helped to develop when the school climate permits all of the adults interacting with the children to serve as successful parent surrogates.

The schools are addressing new problems and opportunities in old and now ineffective ways.

Our society has changed—so have our schools. But by focusing solely on academic changes, the schools have ignored the affective domain—the crucial relationships that students need to grow and learn. We remain mired in a mechanical approach to learning. It's one that has never served our children well—and in today's world dooms many of our students to failure.

For Further Reading

"Alienation and the Four Worlds of Childhood." Urie Bronfenbrenner. *Phi Delta Kappan,* Feb. 1986.

Today's children feel increasing societal and personal pressures. By making caring an essential part of their curriculum, schools can help students build a character strength that can only come from a sense of belonging—something often lacking in the hurried, complex, modern American life.

"Education for Community." James Comer. *Common Decency*. Alvin Schorr, ed. Yale University Press, 1986.

True educational reform should help students achieve a sense of community and purpose both now, within their school—and in the future, in adult society. Teachers can play a key role in helping students develop a sense of belonging that is so necessary for overall life success. Parents, teachers and administrators must work together to design educational programs that meet specific needs of children in a caring, democratic environment.

The Feeling Child: Affective Development Reconsidered. Nancy Curry, ed. Haworth Press, 1986.

Through the writings of several educators and psychologists, this volume emphasizes that knowledge of a child's emotional life can help teachers better understand and educate that child. Today too much emphasis is placed on cognitive skills and strategies. By consulting ever-increasing research on how infants and children grow emotionally, educators can reassess their classroom interactions and curriculums and adapt child-oriented approaches to achieve more successful outcomes.

"Home-School Relationships as They Affect the Academic Success of Children." James Comer, *Education and Urban Society*, May 1984.

Because children's interpersonal and psychosocial experiences have great impact on their ability to succeed in school and adult life, parent-teacher cooperation is crucial if children are to develop academically, socially, and emotionally. Teachers who are sensitive to both the developmental needs of their students and to the goals and aspirations of their students' parents can facilitate positive learning by designing their curriculum and classroom interactional environment to address those needs and goals.

"Integration of Mental Health Principles in the School Setting." Barbara Biber. *Prevention of Mental Disorders in Children*. Gerald

Caplan, ed. Basic Books, 1961.

Increasing evidence documents the close connection between learning functions (cognitive development) and personality formation (social/emotional development), showing that teachers and school environment play an important role in influencing students' mental health as well as their academic success. Effective, caring teachers greatly aid development of students' positive feelings about themselves; realistic perceptions of themselves and others; independence, curiosity, and creativity; relatedness to the world around them; and strength to cope with whatever comes their way. Without attention to these skills, student academic growth is limited.

The Learning Child. Dorothy Cohen. Pantheon Books, 1972.

This book describes the developmental and educational stages of 5- to 11-year olds in the context of home and school, and offers practical guidelines for parents and teachers. It stresses the importance of both the role of the teacher over classroom methods or materials, and of understanding the close interconnections between emotional/social and cognitive development.

Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman. Joyce Antler. Yale University Press, 1987.

The educational philosophy and strategies of Lucy Sprague Mitchell, founder of Bank Street College of Education, are explored as the core of a comprehensive history of "progressive education" in the United States. Mitchell's approach, greatly influenced by the work of John Dewey, emphasizes the importance of children's emotional/social development, interactive learn-by-doing curriculums, and teacher-child cooperation and respect within the classroom environment. Effective teachers show consistent warmth, understanding, gentleness, sense of humor, and insight into the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of the children they seek to teach.

The Montessori Method. Maria Montessori. Schocken Books, 1964.

Like a loving, concerned parent, the school must offer young children a consistent, supportive environment geared to their particular level of development. Children learn by interacting directly with carefully selected learning materials presented to them by teachers striving to move them toward independent, self-directed achievements. Teachers must be sensitive to and understand the learning tasks faced at each stage of development, from the sensori-motor levels of the very young to the intellectual and moral development of older students.

"New Lenses for Viewing Elementary Schools." Allan Shedlin. *Phi Delta Kappan,* Oct. 1986.

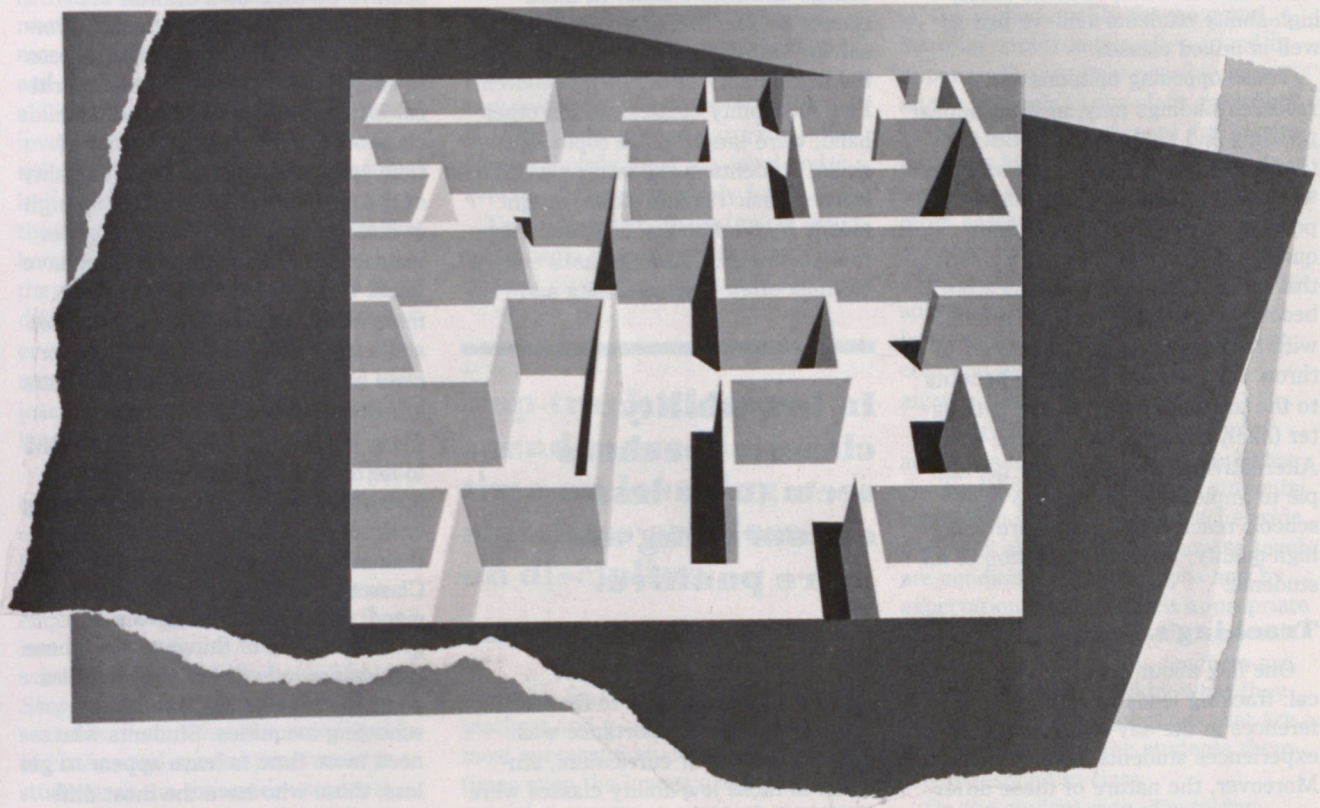
The best elementary schools celebrate the uniqueness of individual students, teachers, and families, and strive to create environments where students and adults respect and feel comfortable with one another. There is a balance between caring about each student as an individual and caring about what the students are learning. Subjective (affective) and objective (academic) factors must both be considered in determining the quality of a school.

Schools of Tomorrow. John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey. E. P. Dutton & Co., 1962.

Teachers teach best if they are sensitive to their students' growth patterns and needs. Schools would be more effective if they trusted and respected children more, let them learn naturally from play and other semi-independent activities, and helped them in their attempts to prepare for an adult world of work and social responsibilities.

Tracking: Can Schools Take a Different Route?

BY JEANNIE OAKES



More and more educators are disenchanted with the process of 'tracking' students in narrow ability groups. These educators are looking for something better—and some have found it.

Jeannie Oakes is a social scientist with the RAND Corporation in Santa Monica, Calif. Her book, Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality *(Yale University Press, 1985), draws on data from John Goodlad's* A Study of Schooling *to analyze the history of tracking and its impact on the nation's poor and minority students.*

Few widespread schooling practices are as controversial as ability grouping and tracking. On one side of the issue, many educators and parents assert that when schools group by ability, teachers are better able to target individual needs and students will learn more. Some supporters argue that the most able students, in particular, require separate educational programs if their talents are to be fully developed. Some link tracking to our national security and economic well-being, contending that the top students need special grooming to be leaders in science, government, and business. Tracking's advocates are supported, in part, by research findings that students in the highest-level classes—college preparatory tracks, gifted and honors programs, accelerated classes—often benefit academically from these programs.

On the other side, growing numbers of school professionals and parents oppose tracking because they believe it locks most students into classes where they are stereotyped as "less able," and where they have fewer opportunities to learn. Many express particular concern about tracking's effects on poor and minority students, who are placed in low-ability groups more often than other students and are less likely to be found in programs for gifted students or in college preparatory tracks. Tracking's critics are

supported by considerable empirical evidence, court decisions, and reform proposals. These suggest that tracking has no overall positive effects. Students in the lowest groups achieve less than students with comparable ability in higher groups or in heterogeneous classes. And, in some cases, high-ability students achieve just as well in mixed classes.

These opposing opinions and research findings may, at first, appear puzzling and contradictory. But further examination sheds light on both sides of the argument and may help point the way out of the tracking quandary. There is growing evidence that as policymakers and educators become increasingly disenchanted with tracking, they may not need to throw out the baby (possible benefits to the top students) with the bathwater (likely disadvantages to the rest). Alternative strategies, while not simple to implement, promise to help schools reach their goal of providing high-quality, relevant education to all students.

Tracking's Consequences

One fact about tracking is unequivocal: tracking leads to substantial differences in the day-to-day learning experiences students have at school. Moreover, the nature of these differences suggests that students who are placed in high-ability groups have access to far richer schooling experiences than other students. This finding helps explain, at least in part, why it is that tracking sometimes seems to "work" for high-ability students and not for others. It also provides clues about what needs to be changed.

A number of studies have documented what teachers already know—students in different track levels have access to different types of knowledge and intellectual skills. Most obvious, of course, are differences in the number and type of high school classes taken by students in college preparatory and non-collegebound tracks. But even at earlier grades, and within subjects that all students take, substantial content differences exist.

Unequal access to knowledge. For example, in John Goodlad's national study of schools, reported in the book *A Place Called School*, students in high-ability English classes were more likely to be taught classic and modern literature, provided instruction in expository writing and library research, and expected to learn vocabulary that would eventually boost their scores on college entrance exams. In these classes critical thinking and problem-solving skills seemed to emerge from the high quality of the course content. Few low-ability classes, on the other hand, were taught these topics and skills. Students in the latter classes learned basic reading skills, taught mostly by workbooks, kits, and easy-to-read stories. Learning tasks consisted most often of memorizing and repeating answers back to the teacher. Since so much of importance was omitted from their curriculum, students in these low-ability classes were likely to have little contact with the knowledge and skills that would allow them to move into higher classes or to be successful if they got there.

In low-ability classes, teachers seem to be less encouraging and more punitive.

Of course, these differences are not restricted to English classes. Similar patterns have been observed in secondary math, science, and social studies classes and in ability-grouped elementary classes—fewer topics, a far more restricted range of topics, and less depth of coverage in remedial and "typical" classes. Some of the most dramatic evidence comes from the highly publicized Second International Math Study, which found that American eighth and twelfth graders lag not only behind their Japanese counterparts, but also behind students in most other industrialized countries. In America, in contrast to other countries, only students in top classes were taught many important topics and skills. The limited exposure of the other American students set boundaries on their achievement. The researchers concluded that the American tracking system, instead of providing appropriate learning opportunities to students of different abilities, appears to restrict what students can achieve by their own efforts.

Uneven classroom opportunities. Perhaps as important as students' access to subject matter knowledge are critical instructional conditions in their classrooms, that is, the quantity of time spent on learning and the quality of the teaching. In both respects, higher-ability classes tend to have better instruction. A number of studies have found that top-track classes spend more class time on learning activities and less on discipline, socializing, or class routines. Higher-ability students are expected to spend more time doing homework. Their teachers tend to be more enthusiastic, to make instructions clearer, and to use strong criticism or ridicule less frequently than teachers of low-ability classes. Classroom tasks are often better organized, and students are given a greater variety of things to do. These differences in learning opportunities point to fundamental and ironic schooling inequities. Students who need more time to learn appear to get less; those who have the most difficulty learning seem to have fewer of the best teachers.

Other important differences have been noted in the classroom atmosphere. Most teachers realize that for students, feeling comfortable in class is more than just a nice addition to learning. They also know that when teachers and students trust one another, class time and energy are freed up for teaching and learning. On the other hand, without a positive classroom climate, students spend considerable energy interfering with the teacher's agenda, and teachers must spend more of their time and energy just trying to maintain control. When classes are tracked, important differences in these climate dimensions appear.

In low-ability classes, for example, teachers seem to be less encouraging and more punitive, placing more emphasis on discipline and behavior

and less on academic learning. Compared to teachers in high-ability classes they seem to be more concerned about getting students to follow directions, be on time, and sit quietly. Students in low-ability classes more often feel excluded from class activities and tend to find their classmates unfriendly. Their classes are more often interrupted by problems and arguing, while students in higher-ability classes seem to be much more involved in their classwork. When they're not being disruptive, students in low-ability classes are often apathetic. The reason for this may be that because they're more likely to fail, they risk more by trying. Where these differences are found, students in lower-ability classes have classroom environments that are less conducive to learning than do their peers in upper-level classes.

What about average kids? The quality of classes for average students usually falls somewhere between the high- and low-class extremes. Some interesting examples of the experiences of average students were found in a recent study of American high schools reported in the book *The Shopping Mall High School.* The researchers found that the proliferation of classes and special programs for students at the extremes—students with high abilities or with handicaps—had the effect of making students in the middle "unspecial" and guaranteeing that they were taught in quite "unspecial" ways. For example, in average classes, many teachers expected relatively little of students. They established set routines of lecturing and doing worksheets, held time and workload demands (both in class and for homework) to a minimum, accepted and sometimes even encouraged distractions, and rarely asked students to think deeply or critically. When classes are conducted in this way, average students, too, are deprived of the best schools have to offer.

Adding up the differences. Of course, high quality experiences are possible in classes at all track levels. Exemplary methods; skilled, dedicated, and even charismatic teachers; abundant resources; and a slew of other tangibles and intangibles can combine to make a "silk purse" out a class that has every reason to be categorized as a "sow's ear." It appears, however, that only the most extraordinary average and low-level classes match the curriculum standards, learning opportunities, and classroom climates of even ordinary high-track classes. Since some research suggests that low-track classes are often assigned to new teachers or to those with lower qualifications, it's not surprising that extraordinarily good low-level and average classes are rarely found.

Taken together, these typical differences begin to suggest why tracking can and often does work well for top students. Start by providing the best teachers and a concentration of the most successful students—and sometimes even the lowest class size. Add special resources, a sense of superior academic "mission," perhaps a parent support group, and these students will get the best education in town. In fact, studies that control for instructional differences—that provide identical curriculum and instruction to both tracked and mixed groups of students—typically find that high-ability students do equally as well in either setting. The fact that students are tracked seems less important than that they have the other instructional advantages that seem to come along with classes that are highly able. It's ironic that when other, less able students are offered similar advantages, they also seem to benefit. No wonder we find a "rich get richer and poor get poorer" pattern of outcomes from tracking. It seems that tracking is both a response to significant differences among students and an ongoing contribution to those differences.

Top-track classes spend more class time on learning activities and less on discipline.

The question of why track-level differences in instruction, climate, and student achievement occur is terribly complicated. An immediate, if overly simplistic, answer that tracking supporters sometimes give is that these differences occur because of the vast differences among the students. That is, the higher-quality teaching and learning opportunities often found in upper tracks are only possible when all the students in the class are bright. Lower quality experiences are inevitable when students are less able. On the other side, tracking opponents often hastily blame mean-spiritedness or social and racial prejudice for the differences. Some even suggest a conspiracy afoot in schools to prevent lower-class students from school success and upward mobility. This answer is also far too simple.

A more likely and more complex answer is that track-level differences get *produced* as teachers and students interact in school. On the teacher side, decisions about what and how to teach are conditioned by traditions and by expectations about what is appropriate for students of different backgrounds and abilities. Obviously, teachers are also greatly influenced by what they think will work—perceptions that are influenced by how the students themselves respond in class.

On the student side, day-to-day classroom behaviors are affected by students' own beliefs about their abilities and their perceptions of their prospects for academic success. Their willingness to make an effort is largely a result of these factors. As students experience success or failure in school, their self-perceptions and attitudes become either more or less conducive to high achievement. Students who expect themselves to be successful respond with effort and achievement. Those who expect to fail are often unwilling to try. In low-track classes, especially in the upper grades, it is difficult to conceive of even the most dedicated and skillful teacher not feeling discouraged by a whole classful of students pulling away from academic achievement. Finally, it is not just the students' resistance the teacher must overcome. Course titles, written curriculums, expectations of

parents and supervisors—all can present additional obstacles to high-quality teaching and learning.

Are these negative consequences of tracking inevitable? Is it possible to turn unproductive interactions around? To create "good" tracking and eliminate the "bad" kind? Some contend that if teachers would raise their expectations and become more "effective," they could create high quality learning environments in average and low-level classes. Perhaps they could. But increasing numbers of educators are concluding that some of the most difficult problems are inherent in the tracking system itself. Students experience lower self-esteem and expect less of themselves when schools publicly identify them as less able. Teachers are required to combat the negative synergy that is produced when the most difficult and discouraged students are concentrated in the same class. Combine these constraints with the fact that poor and minority students—the fastest-growing segments of the school population—have been the most disadvantaged by tracking. These factors are causing more and more educators to seek alternative ways to meet the individual needs of all students within more heterogeneous settings.

Tracking Alternatives

New conceptions of ability. Changing tracking practices is no trivial matter, regardless of how gradual such change might be. One problem lies in the political nature of the tracking question. There are few professionals or parents without strong opinions about it, and often the most vocal and powerful opinions are voiced by those interested in maintaining advantages for the top kids. In multiracial schools—probably because race, class, assessed ability, and track placements are so interrelated—proposals for changing tracking are complicated by the same fears that desegregation raises. In some communities, arguments for more democratic alternatives carry little weight in the face of these other factors. Moreover, before more heterogeneous alternatives can succeed, educators probably need to challenge conventional assumptions about ability and about how individual differences in ability affect school learning.

Creating constructive alternatives to tracking presents technical as well as political problems. Despite promising research findings about heterogeneous grouping, little is likely to be accomplished by simply mixing students up. To be effective, alternatives will probably require fundamental changes. There may be a need for changes in the types of knowledge that children are expected to acquire, in the social organization of schools and classrooms, and in student evaluation. There is little conclusive evidence that specifies exactly how to make mixed-ability classrooms succeed, and no ready-made staff development packages or teaching formulas exist to help schools and teachers move smoothly toward less tracking. Nevertheless, several principles to guide schools' efforts can be drawn from educational theory and research.

Creating constructive alternatives to tracking presents technical as well as political problems.

Perhaps the most important and difficult task for those who would change tracking is to confront deeply held beliefs, such as the belief that academic ability is fixed very early and is largely unchangeable or that achievement differences can be largely accounted for by differences in ability. These views are supported by a long tradition of studying and measuring intelligence—a tradition quickly changing as new theory and research increasingly support alternative views.

Recent work of cognitive psychologists suggests, for example, that academic ability is not unchangeable but developmental—growing throughout childhood. As children interact with their environment, they acquire cognitive abilities. Especially important are studies showing that cognitive abilities can be taught, and that even students who begin school with less developed abilities can learn. Other work suggests that what we conventionally consider "low" ability may not be as limiting as we generally think. The achievement gaps we observe among students of differing abilities are exacerbated by the failure of classrooms to provide all students with the time, opportunities, and resources they need to learn. Benjamin Bloom's work demonstrating that nearly all students can achieve at high levels when they are taught one-on-one, with instruction tailored to their particular learning requirements, provides a powerful example of what is possible. While not a "practical" solution for schools, these remarkable achievements support new beliefs that students thought to have low ability can learn far more than we usually expect.

Prevailing beliefs about the limits of ability are critical. Unless teachers and administrators believe and expect all students to learn well, they will be unlikely to create school and classroom conditions where students believe in their own ability and exert the effort it takes to succeed. Believing that all students are capable is different from believing that all students are valuable, or lovable, or talented "in their own ways." While these latter beliefs are important, they are not substitutes for belief in students' capacity to acquire the intellectually challenging knowledge that is intended for the "best and brightest."

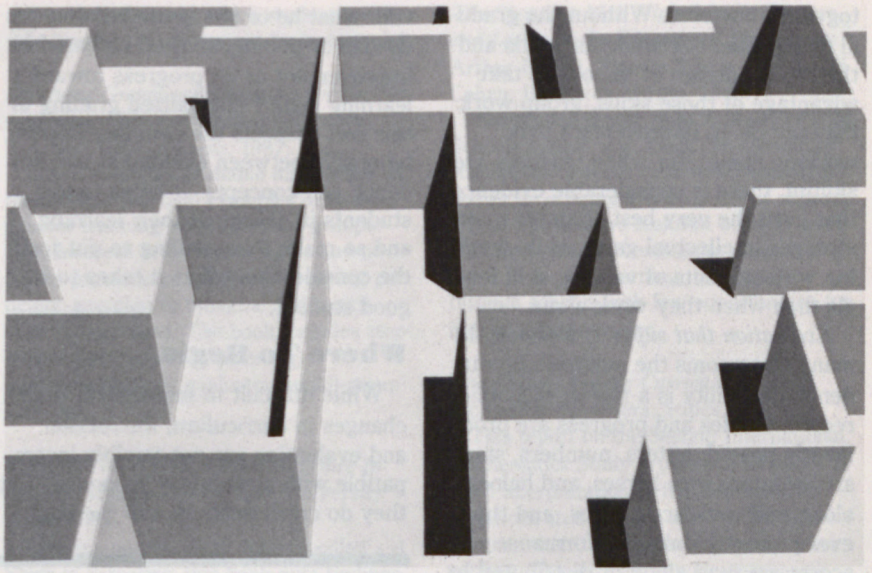
Curriculum rich with meaning. In classrooms where the curriculum consists of a sequence of topics and skills that require prerequisite knowledge and skill mastery, mixing students who have different skills is difficult. Students do differ from one another, and the most striking differences among them might be in the speed at which they master sequentially presented skills. Unless students are similar in learning "speed," such a curriculum raises horrendous problems of pacing. Some students are ready to race ahead, but others lag behind. Enrichment for the quicker students often becomes make-work; reteaching becomes a chore; being retaught can be humiliating for the

slower student.

Heterogeneous groups of students will probably do best in classrooms where the curriculum content is challenging, complex, related to real life, and—most of all—rich with meaning. When curriculum is organized around the central themes of a subject area rather than around disconnected topics and skills, all students stand the greatest chance of enhancing their intellectual development. Students need not be held back from ideas because of skill differences; rather they can acquire skills as they become ready. Moreover, classroom knowledge that remains connected to its larger context is much easier for students to understand and use. Finally, when students grapple with complex problems, solutions have to be compatible with so many ideas—fit with so many contexts—that two people rarely come up with identical solutions. While right answers certainly have their place, with a concept-based curriculum there are opportunities for multiple right answers and multiple routes to success.

This approach is far from a compromise in order to do good for those with low ability. A highly prescriptive, skill-based approach to curriculum may do a disservice to students regardless of whether they are in heterogeneous or tracked classes—whether they are slow to learn or highly skilled. With a concept-based approach to curriculum, however, the range of skill differences among students is likely to diminish greatly as an obstacle to teaching and learning.

Some rules of thumb can help teachers judge whether the lessons they plan are likely to help students of all ability levels succeed. First, lessons will probably be most successful if they require active learning tasks rather than passive ones, and if they have students working together rather than alone. Second, learning tasks are probably most helpful when they are full of complications and when they require multiple abilities—thinking, discussing, writing, visualizing—to accomplish. Third, learning tasks will suit most students if they are modeled on complex and challenging real-world problem solving. These guidelines keep the curriculum from drifting too far into the highly technical and abstract world of "school" knowledge and too far away from "the real thing."



Learning tasks will suit most students if they're modeled on complex and challenging real-world problem solving.

Interactive classroom organization. Some ways of organizing classrooms are more conducive to student learning than others. In the standard classroom, instruction is characterized by:

- competitive whole-group instruction
- lecturing as the prevailing teaching strategy
- common assignments
- uniform due dates and tests
- a single set of standards of competence and criteria for grades.

Usually students work alone, silently. They occasionally get a chance to articulate, explain, offer reasons, and try to be convincing about what they are learning. But too often these occasions turn into performances that all listening quickly judge as either right or wrong, smart or dumb. Some students cope successfully in such environments by being quick to figure out "right answers" and gaining the status of being "smart." But few students, even the quickest ones, can use such classroom routines to explore and make sense of new ideas and experiences. The risks of self-exposure can be too great.

If students of all abilities are to benefit from being taught together, classrooms will probably need to be organized far differently, providing a diversity of tasks and interactions with few "public" comparisons of students' ability. A vast amount of classroom research has identified many of the necessary academic and social conditions for students to work together productively. With cooperative learning strategies, for example, students can exchange ideas and help in small groups. Frequently they will work at separate but interrelated tasks. Teachers can function like conductors, getting things started and keeping them moving along, providing information and resources, coordinating the buzz of activity taking place. Such classrooms present a variety of paths to success, and when such classes are skillfully orchestrated, any one student's strengths—or weaknesses—are seldom held up to the class for display, comparison, or embarrassment.

While group work is no panacea, the advantages are considerable. Teachers cannot simply tell students to move their chairs and work

together, however. Without the gradual development of students' skills and the careful design of lessons to take advantage of those skills, group work may not be an improvement over working alone. But when teachers are skillful, there is considerable evidence that even the very best students make stronger intellectual gains while working with students of varying skill levels than when they work alone.

Evaluation that supports learning. In many classrooms the evidence of students' capability is a matter of public record. Grades and progress are prominently posted: letters, numbers, stars, smiley faces, race horses, and haloes—along with sad faces, zeros, and the ever-present blanks. Performance scores are read aloud or distributed by other students. Even the results of aptitude, achievement, and other types of standardized tests get out when scores are read, carelessly left available, or shared voluntarily by students. Most public displays are well-enough meant: good work shown as a matter of pride, intended to motivate and provide examples for others. But too often they are convenient and irresistible opportunities for comparison. Similarly, conventional grades and standardized test scores are easily summed up into measures of a student's overall worth. They become raw materials for a consensus that develops in classrooms about who is a good student and who isn't.

To be successful, heterogeneous classrooms probably need to lean toward placing students more in charge of their own evaluation—checking their own understanding and asking for and providing feedback. This is what happens naturally when students are engaged in complex tasks and have lots of interaction.

This doesn't imply that teachers abandon their evaluation responsibilities. For teachers, evaluation might involve more private, individual questions, such as, "What did she learn?" rather than "How did she compare with others?" When evaluations are more formalized, they probably need to be "student-referenced" and criterion-referenced, rather than norm-referenced, that is, they should compare what a student knows after instruction with what he or she knew before. Grades or points can then be based on improvement or on progress toward a learning goal. Personalized grading of this sort respects the complex interrelationship between evaluation and students' self-concepts. It helps to put students in charge of their learning and so make them willing to put forth the considerable effort it takes to be a good student.

Where To Begin

While difficult to implement, such changes in curriculum, instruction, and evaluation are not terribly incompatible with elementary schooling. But they do crash head on into the standard practices of middle and high schools, where grouping, teaching, and evaluation policies are firmly grounded in the notions of sorting, standardization, and competition. Additionally, secondary educators are constrained from making changes by the experience of students in earlier grades.

Teachers need time and the professional autonomy to deliberate about, develop, and experiment with fundamental changes in school organization and classroom practice.

Typically, low-track high school students have been in low-ability groups and remedial programs since elementary school. The gap between them and more successful students has grown wider—not only in achievement but in attitudes toward school and toward their own ability to succeed. By the time students reach secondary school, track-related achievement and attitude differences are often well established. These differences undoubtedly limit the alternatives to tracking that might be attempted. Consequently, alternatives will be most effective if they begin early. Junior high is probably too late—and first grade is probably not too early.

Nevertheless, the fact that secondary schools face special problems doesn't mean there's nothing they can do about tracking. Gradual changes in tracking systems can be initiated, even if some tracking is maintained. For example, instead of being dead ends, low-track classes (for example, "general" mathematics) might become "prep" courses for participation in high-track classes (for example, algebra). Some one-year college prep courses can be offered in two years for students without the necessary background, or stretched out over the summer. The number of tracks in a particular subject can be reduced, and tracks in a few subjects or grades might be eliminated altogether—in social studies or in all seventh grade courses, for instance. Combined classes composed of more than one track level can be team-taught or multigraded to permit flexible subgroupings around specific skills. Counselors can *recruit* students for academic programs, rather than using strict placement criteria for keeping them out. Slower students can be mainstreamed into regular or more advanced classes, and after-school peer or adult tutoring programs can help them keep up with their classmates. New criteria might be initiated that ensure racial and ethnic balances in classes at all track levels and in special programs for the gifted. The distinction between vocational and academic programs can be blurred by infusing the curriculum of vocational classes with academic concepts and that of academic classes with real-life, hands-on learning experiences.

Obviously, the kinds of changes likely to promote high-quality learning for all students in heterogeneous classrooms go far beyond mere fine tuning of current practice. These changes also require fundamental changes in the structure of schooling and teachers' work. Finally, as with most major reform initiatives, teacher professionalism is central to successful tracking alternatives. Working with their communities, school staffs can design

changes that are compatible with school goals and also politically manageable. But unless teachers have the time and the professional autonomy to deliberate about, develop, and experiment with fundamental changes in school organization and classroom practices, alternatives to tracking are unlikely to be intelligently conceived, enthusiastically endorsed, or successfully implemented.

For Further Reading

Cooperative Learning in Student Teams: What Research Says to the Teacher. Revised edition. Robert Slavin. National Education Association, 1986.

Slavin provides a careful review of the research on the effect of cooperative small-group learning on student achievement and attitudes. Of special interest are syntheses of the findings about the positive effects of these strategies in multiracial classrooms and in classrooms in which students with mild learning handicaps are mainstreamed.

Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom. Elizabeth Cohen. Teachers College Press, 1987.

Cohen combines readable discussions of theory with practical examples of strategies for teaching heterogeneous groups. She discusses both the strengths and potential problems of groupwork, paying particular attention to bilingual and multiability classrooms. The book includes step-by-step approaches to planning, implementing, and evaluating small-group activities.

Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality. Jeannie Oakes. Yale University Press, 1985.

Drawing on data from John Goodlad's *A Study of Schooling*, this book puts findings on tracking practices in junior and senior high schools into the context of tracking's history, and discusses its implications for the education of poor and minority students.

The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace. Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David Cohen. Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

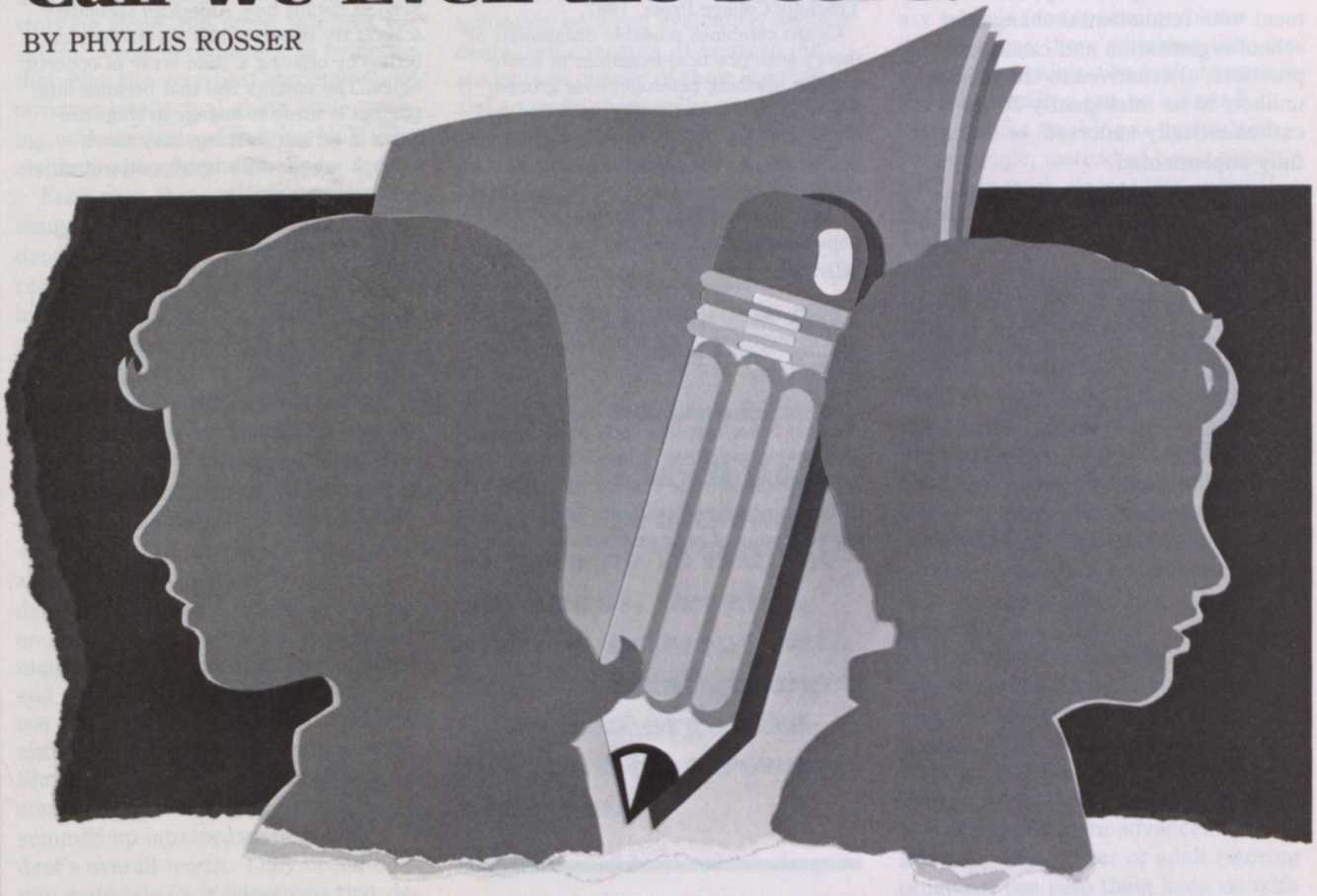
The second report from A Study of High Schools details how American secondary schools try to serve their diverse student bodies by offering a wide array of opportunities. The authors feel that because little attempt is made to engage average students in serious learning, they move through schools with few opportunities for high-quality education.

The Underachieving Curriculum. Curtis McKnight and others. Stipes, 1987.

This report on the Second International Mathematics Study provides a straightforward interpretation of the findings that American students are lower math achievers than their counterparts in many other nations. The authors provide persuasive evidence to link this lower performance to tracking and the uneven opportunities to learn mathematics that result.

Girls, Boys, and the SAT: Can We Even the Score?

BY PHYLLIS ROSSER



Everyone has a theory about why boys outscore girls on the SATs. Who's right? We need to know—because the current test score disparities are penalizing an entire generation of young women.

Phyllis Rosser is a contributing editor to Ms. *magazine and a researcher and writer on educational issues, with expertise in educational testing. She initiated the original research on sex bias in tests that sparked a round of hearings on Capitol Hill. She is continuing to research the bias-in-testing issue with a federal grant from the Women's Educational Equity Act program.*

Girls get higher average grades than boys in both high school and college. Simple logic would seem to dictate that they would also score higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). They don't—and they haven't for the past 20 years. In fact, since 1972, when boys began to outscore girls on the verbal section as well as the math section, the gap between the sexes has gradually widened to a current average combined score difference of 57 points. Why?

This question has no conclusive answer, but there are several theories that may partially explain why girls' and women's SAT scores don't match their classroom performance.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS), which publishes the SAT, and the College Board, which originally commissioned the SAT, have taken the position that girls are less adequately prepared in school than boys are. ETS president Gregory Anrig told *USA Today* that more females than males take the SAT and that a larger proportion of the females come from lower-income families. Since lower-income students are less likely to take college preparatory courses—which not surprisingly, provide better preparation than other courses for the SAT—female average SAT scores are lower. The problem with this argument is that, according to ETS statistics, the particular girls who actually take the SAT have higher grades as a

group than the particular boys who take it.

College Board spokesperson Fred Moreno has another theory. He says girls average 50 points lower than boys on the SAT math section because they take less high school math and science. But the College Board's *Profiles, College-bound Seniors, 1985* seems to contradict this theory, noting that girls are almost as likely as boys (50.5 percent vs. 57.6 percent) to have taken four years of math.

Some SAT critics question the relevancy of comparing either college or high school grade-point averages to SAT scores. Moreno claims that women are less likely than men to take college engineering and science courses and that it's harder to get high grades in engineering and science than in the courses women do take, such as humanities. Thus, he contends, it's not surprising that girls' college grade-point averages are higher than their SAT scores might have predicted. But College Board validity studies show that women who major in engineering and math in college tend to receive higher grades than their SAT scores predicted. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which has been admitting women with SAT math scores that are lower than those of their male peers, finds they perform as well as men throughout college.

Still on the subject of grade-point averages, others think girls receive higher grades because they try harder to please their teachers—a quality that may lead to inflated grades.

Some research evidence supports a behavioral connection, but grades are a collective evaluation of many more skills than are measured by a multiple-choice test—such as the ability to think at complex levels, solve problems, organize information, and express oneself clearly. Reinforcing the point that girls write better than boys, is the fact that girls score higher than boys do on tests of writing ability, including the College Board English Composition Achievement Test, published by ETS.

A wide range of people hold either the format or the content of the SAT itself responsible for girls' poor showing. Professor Carol Tittle of the City University of New York notes there is not much difference between the sexes in item performance on the standardized achievement tests administered in high schools nationally.

A number of researchers, including Harvard psychologist and educator Carol Gilligan, have found that males and females approach learning differently. Gilligan believes that socialization provides females with a different set of life experiences that cause them to develop values different from those of males. This in turn affects the way they analyze and solve problems. She's found that females are more interested in social context and the integration of self and society, while males are more interested in abstract ideas and the segregation of self from society.

A wide range of people hold either the format or the content of the SAT itself responsible for girls' poor showing.

Applying Gilligan's theories to testing, ETS researcher Phyllis Teitelbaum criticizes the format. Teitelbaum says standardized tests exemplify the masculine way of learning, because they are value-free, require a choice of one "right answer" with no chance to explain choices, emphasize quantitative subject matter rather than the arts and humanities, test understanding of small bits of knowledge in isolation rather than large chunks of related information, and are given in a hurried, competitive environment that girls may find more stressful than boys do. Essay questions, on the other hand, favor girls because they allow more creative and complex answers to be presented within a context of related information.

Teitelbaum's explanation, however, leaves us with the question of why women's test scores have declined so much over the past 15 years. If standardized tests work against girls, why is the problem worse now, at a time when their aspirations have never been higher?

In addition to the possible effect of the test's form, there are questions about its content. Young women may find the SAT less "user-friendly" than young men do because of its emphasis on male-oriented content. References to males have consistently outnumbered references to females in the reading comprehension passages. And their content often features (and therefore sanctions) male accomplishments in politics and science. Berkeley lawyer and testing consultant David White even suggests that showing women as less effective in the world creates an emotional tone that has a negative effect on female self-confidence during the test.

Why is male accomplishment a favorite topic in the SAT? Why do questions about nurturing and relationships that reflect female values appear less frequently, sending the message that human relationships have no place in the definition of intelligence? If the test questions reflected male and female values more evenly, would girls' scores improve?

Although ETS is making considerable effort through its "sensitivity review" process to equalize references to males and females, as recently as June 1986 reading passages still showed an imbalance. Analyzing one of the SATs given at that time, I found nine men mentioned but only one woman. Seven of the men were famous politicians or poets—Theodore Roosevelt, Booker T. Washington, Homer, Shakespeare, Blake, Milton, and Wordsworth—but the woman was a fictional character of no significance. ETS sensitivity coordinator Gertrude Conlan justifies this imbalance by saying that "women today would never succeed...if they were deterred by reading material and courses that emphasized male dominance in their chosen fields."

Eleanor Smeal, former president of the National Organization for Women, believes the problems in format and content are deliberate. She charges that the SAT was intentionally made more difficult for women because "something had to be done to make it look objective rather than discriminatory in excluding women from scholar-

ships and other educational opportunities despite the fact that women and girls had better grades."

A further possibility, soon to be fully explored, is that the SAT contains a large proportion of questions whose content unduly favors *white* males. The New York State legislature passed a bill last June that requires ETS to analyze the right and wrong answers on all questions on the 1988-89 tests to determine patterns of questions that may favor one sex or ethnic group over another. The results of this and other studies will tell us much about whether the problem lies within the test or with such outside factors as differences in experience or test anxiety.

Also still unexplained is why, according to a recent study by professors Marcia Linn and Janet Hyde (respectively of the University of California-Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin), the SAT is the only standardized test in which girls are receiving lower verbal scores. ETS has been hard-pressed to explain this trend, which has been increasing gradually over the past 15 years.

ETS researchers have found that girls and minority males perform less well than white males on selecting analogies—comparisons of the relationships between words. This is a strange phenomenon because, as U.S. Department of Education researcher Susan Klein points out, "the size of a person's reading vocabulary is supposed to be related to the amount of reading they do, and many studies show that females are likely to read more than males." Since the verbal section is primarily a vocabulary test, the unexpected low score indicates that girls may have adequate vocabularies but need to practice making high-speed word comparisons in order to improve their skill in this precise kind of logical reasoning. Ironically, girls receive higher scores than boys on the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE), a part of the SAT that is reported to colleges but not included in the overall score.

Klein has also suggested that the test's regular verbal section may be written so that it excludes high and low levels of ability, only measuring a middle range. If this is so, it may be working against girls, who generally excel in this area, both in the classroom and on other standardized tests. She says she has "not heard of people making decisions about verbal or communications ability based on either the SAT Verbal or the TSWE."

It's the SAT math section, however, that's provided a consistent and conspicuous gap between girls' and boys' scores. A New York State Education Department study recently found that ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade math scores on the Regents Exams were virtually identical for boys and girls. Yet, according to ETS researcher Nancy Burton, boys have scored higher on the SAT math section since the test was first published.

Young women may find the SAT less 'user-friendly' than young men do because of its emphasis on male-oriented content.

This is unfortunate. Although girls' high school and college math grades are higher than boys' grades, the SAT result has had more effect on the popular mind, reinforcing the notion that girls are less able mathematically than boys are.

This perception—the ultimate in explanations for girls' lower test scores—has been strengthened by the work of Johns Hopkins psychologist Julian Stanley of the Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth. Ten years ago, as Stanley looked for mathematically gifted youngsters, he found that seventh graders with outstanding mathematical ability could receive high SAT math scores without the benefit of high school algebra, geometry, or advanced mathematics—an apparent indication that the test measures actual mathematical ability. Stanley also found that although equal numbers of mathematically gifted boys and girls are recruited to take the SAT, twice as many boys as girls score over 500. This result led him and his research associate, Camilla Benbow, to suggest that girls are genetically inferior in math. They hypothesize that the male sex hormone, testosterone, may slow the development of the left hemisphere of the brain (the seat of verbal intelligence). As a result, the right hemisphere, which tends to be specialized for spatial ability, becomes stronger in boys. Stanley and Benbow theorize that this may give boys an advantage in the ability to visualize answers to math problems.

Most education researchers disagree with this theory, saying it ignores the fact that some girls are brilliant in math. And they point to numerous studies that show how pressures from home, school, and society discourage girls from pursuing mathematics with the same purposefulness as boys, even before they reach high school.

Theories aside, the practical effect of girl's lower scores on both the SAT and the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), also published by ETS, is that girls are losing out academically, financially, and psychologically.

Nearly all of the 1,500 accredited four-year colleges and universities in the country require applicants to submit scores from the SAT or the American College Testing Program (ACT). (Girls score slightly lower than boys on the total ACT assessment as well.) Many employ strict cut-off scores or use the SAT score as part of an admissions formula. The result is that fewer girls are admitted to the most competitive schools, despite their outstanding academic records. Girls also tend to lower their expectations—they don't apply to schools where the published SAT averages of the freshman class are higher than their own scores.

What's at Stake Here?

High school girls have fewer opportunities than boys do to take the accelerated and academic enrichment programs offered to high school students. Every summer Johns Hopkins University's Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth

invites high-achieving (in math) seventh graders to take the SAT math test. Those with scores of 500 or more are invited to attend the Center's summer camps. Although an equal number of outstanding male and female math students took the test last year, 2,594 boys but only 1,081 girls received the minimum score of 500 and an invitation to join the summer program.

Girls also lose millions of dollars in Merit Scholarship awards. The National Merit Scholarship Corporation's Annual Report shows that girls received only 36 percent of the National Merit Scholarships in 1985-86 because of lower PSAT and SAT scores. This year, National Merit reported that only 34.7 percent of the semi-finalists were females. The New York State Board of Regents decided to stop using the SAT as a basis for awarding its own Empire State Scholarships of Excellence (worth $10 million) when it became publicly known that girls received only 28 percent of the awards while boys received 72 percent.

But no one can estimate the psychological damage that is done by unfairly low test scores, which often become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Eleanor Smeal observes: "The SAT helps destroy girls' self-confidence. They internalize it and feel that they can't compete."

Girls are more likely than boys to view the SAT as an assessment of their intelligence, according to Harvard professor Carol Gilligan.

"Boys play the test like a pinball game—no way do they think it measures their intelligence," Gilligan says. "But for girls it is a moral question. If the test measures their intelligence, then it is morally wrong to get the right answer by guessing or looking for the test writer's tricks."

And since girls tend to internalize failure and success, their scores have more meaning for them. Gilligan believes girls should be taught to treat the test as a game they must learn to play, in order to compete more successfully with boys. But they may take considerable convincing. Former SAT coach Kathy Kelly-Benjamin reports that when she tried to teach the tricks of the test, girls wouldn't believe them (see Princeton Review's *Cracking the System* for SAT tricks.)

No one can estimate the psychological damage that is done by unfairly low test scores, which often become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Whatever the reasons for the SAT gap, teachers can take steps to hold down the damage that it does to students.

First, all students need to understand that despite the public perception, the SAT is not a test of intelligence. It is solely designed to predict first-year college performance—and for some students, more of whom are girls and minorities, it doesn't succeed at that task. It has never claimed to predict college performance beyond freshman year, or success in later life. Recently, the SAT has been used to find math geniuses at the seventh grade level, to compare states on student achievement, to select Merit Scholarship recipients, and even to make hiring decisions—all uses for which it was never intended.

Schools and teachers can help female students to reduce their test anxiety by encouraging them *not* to internalize their SAT scores. This is doubly necessary for minority women, who also receive lower average scores than the men in their ethnic groups. For example, in 1985, Black women averaged 43 points lower than Black men, who in turn averaged 221 points lower than white men.

What the SAT does test is how good a test taker you are. This is a skill with a limited use, as there are no jobs based on the ability to pick the best answer out of five on a multiple-choice test. Students—especially girls—need to know about the test's limitations so they will not spend the rest of their lives thinking they are smart or stupid on the basis of a three-hour examination they took in high school.

Advice for Teachers

A New Jersey English teacher who works as an SAT coach outside the classroom has found that coaching strategies are helpful in his teaching—and help students learn to think in ways the tests require. He says, "Three times a week I give my seventh and eighth graders an 'analogy of the day.' I have them make up a practice sentence that defines the first two words. For example, if the words are *handkerchief:tissue,* the sentence could be 'You wipe your brow with a handkerchief or a tissue, but you throw only the tissue away.' This gives them a sense of the relationship to look for in the correct answer. They usually find a comparison that fits immediately and eliminate the rest easily."

This teacher also gives his students

"sentence completions for the day" and practice on the SAT reading comprehension passages. "I've been giving my low-achieving eighth graders two or three selections a week, with guidelines about reading the first line, reading the questions, and underlining. I find that several of them will get four or five of the six passages correct by the end of the first week. The next week they ask for more." He also drills students in paraphrasing or drawing inferences. Too often, he says, we go from asking students literal questions to evaluative ones and skip the inferential training.

Since the SAT is acknowledged as a test that favors the "high flyers" in math and science—the majority of whom are boys—it is most important that teachers encourage girls to take more advanced math and science courses, subjects they traditionally have been discouraged from pursuing.

National studies show that females consistently outscore males in arithmetic computation, but after age 13 their problem-solving skills decline markedly. Special courses or tutoring that develop young women's problem-solving abilities should enhance their SAT performance. A British study of standardized math testing found that the questions had "a quality of being disconnected from everyday life that was very noticeable" and that this approach discourages women more than men. This would indicate that math problem-solving training for women would be more effective if it used word problems that have particular relevance to women's lives. Carol Tittle has also found that people who enjoy solving math puzzles or playing math games tend to answer the most difficult SAT math questions correctly. So practice in this skill also may enhance female performance.

On the practical level of SAT math coaching, girls may need more intensive training than boys in geometry and math problem-solving. ETS director of test development Carol Dwyer has noted that girls perform better on algebra than geometry questions. This suggests that girls may benefit from extra attention to geometry.

But improvement in female math scores will require important attitudinal changes. Math teachers can be instrumental in combating the two major problems that keep girls from pursuing high levels of math—math anxiety and their failure to perceive math as useful in their careers.

First of all, girls need to be reassured that they are as mathematically able as boys. Professors Janis Jacobs (University of Nebraska) and Jacquelynne Eccles (University of Michigan) have found that the popularization of Stanley and Benbow's theory of genetic inferiority has had a direct effect on parents' perception of their daughters' mathematical ability. After reading about Stanley and Benbow's work in *Newsweek*, mothers lowered their expectations for their daughters' math performance. Fathers' expectations rose slightly, but mothers' beliefs had greater influence, and their daughters' math anxiety increased. Since math anxiety is directly related to scores, one may hypothesize that subsequent math scores declined.

Whatever the reasons for the SAT gap, teachers can take steps to hold down the damage to their students.

Of course, the problem of making an effort stems from societal expectations as well. As high school senior Susie Casente said in Daniel Goleman's recent *New York Times* article ("Girls and Math: Is Biology Really Destiny?"), "So many girls in my math class moan and groan that it's just too hard. Girls are expected to be dainty and not work hard. And because math is hard work, a lot of them consider it unfeminine." This view of math as unfeminine has led teachers, parents, and peers to disparage girls' math abilities, says Marsha Lakes Matyas, director of the Women in Science project for the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The resulting insecurity girls may feel is a major factor contributing to their avoiding math and science. This means that teachers working with girls must constantly challenge this view.

One of the important ways teachers can do this is to treat girls and boys equally in the math classroom. American University professors Myra and David Sadker, in their groundbreaking work on "classroom climate," found that despite their best intentions, teachers give the more aggressive male students more attention than other students. They call on them more frequently and ask them more complex, open-ended questions requiring abstract reasoning and extended answers. Girls were more often asked basic memory-type questions or given the correct answer rather than being challenged to work the problem on their own. The message was: boys make mistakes because they do not try hard enough, and girls make mistakes because they are not smart enough.

According to Goleman, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics is committed to eliminating psychological as well as institutional barriers to young women's excelling in math and has involved individual teachers in this effort. Several years ago James Nicholson, a math teacher at Darien High School in Connecticut, began a community campaign to persuade parents to encourage their daughters to take more math. "In two years, we increased our girls' enrollment," he said, "and girls now have higher SAT scores than before."

ETS researcher Patricia Lund Casserly has found that the earlier girls are ability-grouped for math (preferably by third, fourth, or fifth grades), the easier it is for them to pursue advanced math courses. Having female friends who share their interest and abilities in math and science helps them deal with the teasing and disapproval of boys, which peaks in ninth grade. Teachers are also instrumental in encouraging them to take advanced math and science courses in eighth and ninth grades, when peer pressure to conform to the female stereotype is strongest.

University of Wisconsin professor Elizabeth Fennema has found that girls not only lack confidence in their mathematical ability but are also less

likely than boys to perceive mathematics as personally useful in their adult lives. Young women have been slow to realize that the ever-increasing technical complexity of work is going to require higher levels of math and computer proficiency for career success in almost any field.

Goleman reports that school, community, and professional organizations have started a number of programs to encourage women to develop their math and science skills. This year Girls Clubs of America's Operation SMART (Science, Math and Relevant Technology) will offer afternoon and weekend study sessions, combined with talks by female mathematicians and scientists, to 250,000 girls ages six to 18, to encourage math and science participation. Mount Holyoke College offers a "Summermath" curriculum for high school girls, designed to bolster self-confidence and keep young women in the math sequence so they won't be closed out of careers. And the Mathematical Association of America has created a program that brings female mathematicians and scientists to schools and community groups, where they lead workshops and offer guidance to about 10,000 students a year. Making careers in math and science more acceptable for females should have a significant impact on the societal attitude that math is unfeminine.

But mathematically gifted young women may benefit most from having teachers who encourage them at an early age. Casserly found that girls didn't automatically realize they were mathematically gifted; they needed to be told. Teachers who identified their talent and encouraged them to "do something important" with it as early as age eight or nine were important influences. She describes the aggressive recruiting efforts of Advanced Placement teachers who sought out junior high school girls with outstanding math and science talent. Often these students had never discussed their interest with an adult before. The AP teacher became a mentor during their high school career, even convincing reluctant parents to invest in their child's ability. One teacher spent considerable time persuading a father to fill out a scholarship form so his daughter could attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. According to Casserly, the father felt "it was O.K. for her to be a scientist if that's what she wanted, but he couldn't imagine a girl being at the very top in her field and therefore worth the investment."

Some teachers may want to take their concerns over the fairness of the SAT beyond the classroom to the publishers of the test. A growing testing reform movement of educators and administrators throughout the country is making itself heard on testing policy issues through the National Center for Fair and Open Testing in Cambridge, Mass. Schools may also want to consider switching to the other major college entrance exam, on which girls score only slightly lower than boys—and higher on the verbal subtest—the American College Testing Program's ACT Assessment.

For now, at least, it seems teachers will have to spend considerable time preparing girls to take the SAT. And that raises several disturbing issues. How much classroom time should be devoted to SAT preparation? Does this give students the best preparation for living creative and productive lives? After all, it seems pretty clear that the SAT ignores more of what's taught than it tests. It also discriminates against the creative individual who tends to waste time "thinking" about the correct answer—or about whether any of the answers are correct—and favors the student who chooses the traditionally correct answer and quickly moves on.

Finally, can we afford to withhold the best educational opportunities from creative students or other poor test takers—as well as women and minorities? Since educators and researchers agree that grades are not the best predictors of future success, isn't it time to question society's overwhelming belief in the value of the SAT and work as best we can to bring the test back into perspective—as a useful but flawed evaluation tool?

For Further Reading

Cracking The System: The SAT. Adam Robinson and John Katzman. Villard Books, 1986.

The entrepreneurs who created the highly successful Princeton Review coaching school describe their techniques in an easy-to-use handbook useful for PSAT and SAT preparation.

Handbook for Achieving Sex Equity Through Education. Susan S. Klein, editor. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.

A comprehensive collection of articles by leading educational equity researchers on promoting sex equity in the classroom and implementing sex equity in educational administration. Includes chapters on sex equity in testing, classroom organization and climate, and instructional materials.

In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development. Carol Gilligan. Harvard University Press, 1982.

Gilligan describes the differences between the sexes in the way they think about moral relationships and the effect of these relationships on how they learn and live.

None of the Above: Behind The Myth of Scholastic Aptitude. David Owen. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985.

Owen gives detailed information about how SAT test questions are constructed and how to "beat the test." He also challenges the myth of "scientific infallibility" that he says ETS has created between itself and the public.

Sex Bias in College Admissions Tests: Why Women Lose Out. Phyllis Rosser with the staff of the National Center for Fair and Open Testing. National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 1987.

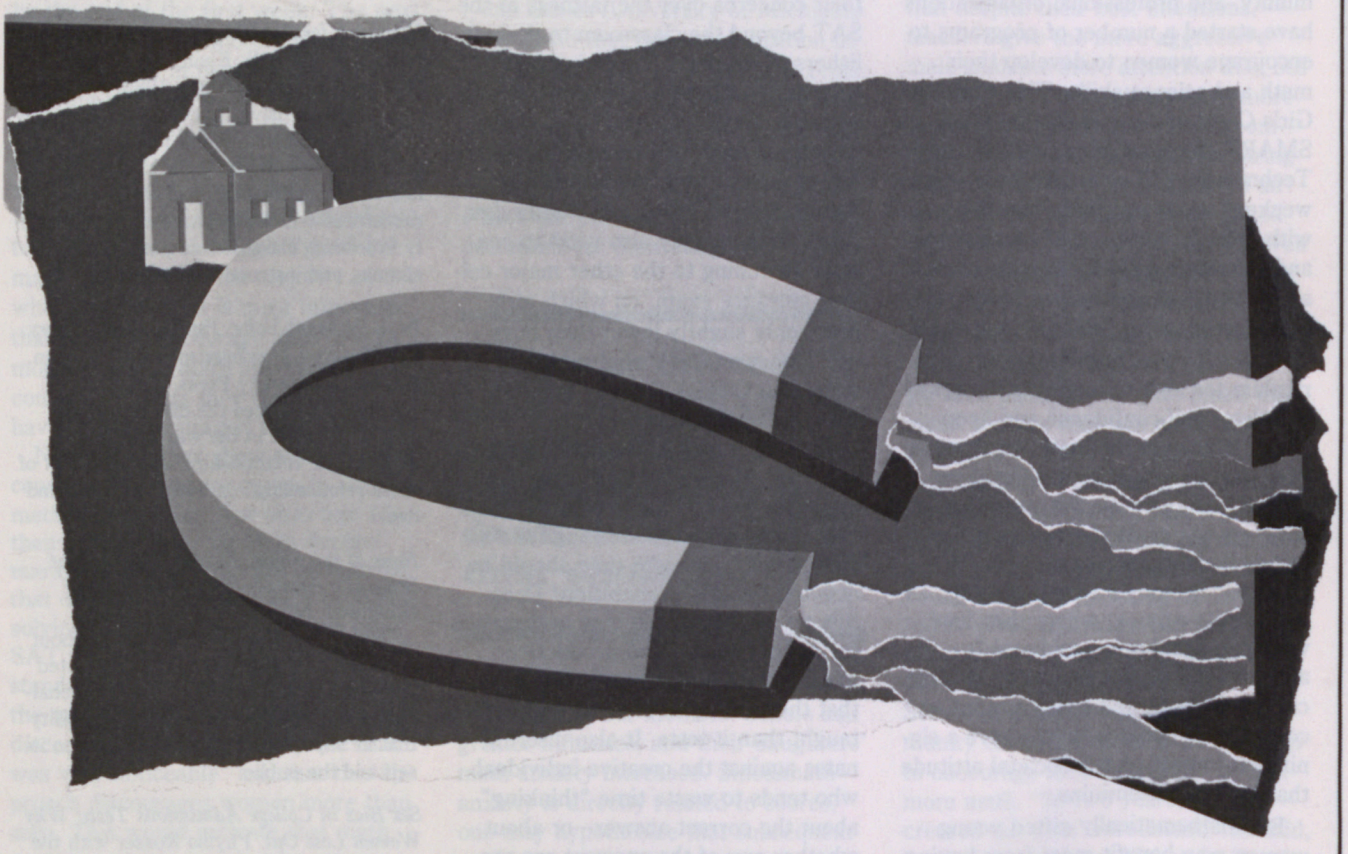
This report summarizes the effects of testing on girls' merit scholarship and academic opportunities. It includes a state-by-state breakdown by gender of the National Merit Semi-Finalists for 1986-87, a partial listing of other merit scholarships that use SAT or ACT scores to determine winners, and a listing of colleges that have SAT cutoff scores for admission or use the SAT score in a qualifying admissions formula. (May be ordered from FairTest, Box 1272, Cambridge, MA 02238.)

"Sexist Equations." Sheila Tobias. *Psychology Today*, January 1982.

It was Tobias who first recognized and described the problem of "math anxiety" for girls and women. In this article, she refutes the Stanley and Benbow theory that females have innate mathematical inferiority.

In Education, Magnets Attract Controversy

BY MARY HAYWOOD METZ



Magnet schools can meet important social as well as educational needs. But they challenge a pervasive myth—that the only way to achieve educational equality is through standardization.

Mary Metz is professor of education at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Her most recent book, Different by Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet Schools, *explores the characteristics of three formerly traditional middle schools and their transition to magnet status.*

Magnet schools simultaneously address two important social needs—desegregation and educational innovation. They are being established in increasing numbers and are attracting lively interest from policymakers across the country. Magnets are schools with educational innovations for which students volunteer; spaces are filled within racial quotas so that the schools will be desegregated.

Magnet schools thus reward students for participating voluntarily in desegregation by offering them an innovative education. They can convert parents who might otherwise be reluctant to send their children to desegregated schools into eager participants in desegregation programs.

The innovative charter of magnet schools allows these schools to design programs that accommodate the economic, cultural, and academic diversity common in student bodies of desegregated schools. This charter also frees the magnet schools from standard formulas for education—formulas that have not been working well with increasing proportions of students—and gives them license to develop distinctive educational ap-

proaches. Last, but not least, parents and students participate voluntarily and may leave a magnet school without changing their residence. This relationship can generate some of the same enthusiasm and commitment to the school found in the voluntary bond private schools are able to forge with students and parents.

If magnet schools can do all these things, one would expect them to be universally endorsed and to be taking our nation's cities by storm. In fact, magnets are popular, and they are spreading. But they are also resisted and resented—a subject of hot political debate in many communities. Magnet schools run afoul of some established, powerful organizational and political forces in public schooling. They also challenge a strong and pervasive myth—the idea that equal educational opportunity requires that the same education, in effect a standardized education, be offered to all students.

Why Magnet Schools?

Magnet schools are important because both racial desegregation and educational innovation are crucial if we are to provide a sound education to the generation of students now in our public schools. Despite continuing debate, there is widespread evidence that desegregated schools improve minority students' achievement—at least when the students attend desegregated schools from the earliest grades—without hurting white achievement.

Less attention has been paid to the long-term social effects of desegregation. It leads minority children to increase their participation in mainstream white institutions when they are older—to participate in "white" colleges, work settings, and neighborhoods. In other words, desegregation gives minority students a better education and a better opportunity to make their way into the mainstream of society.

But desegregation is not just a social good for the minority children who participate. White America needs to realize that the coming generation is one-third minority. When those minority children are adults, it will be necessary not only for their welfare, but for society's, that this third of our population have the technical skills and social confidence to participate fully in all sectors of the economy and polity. For this to happen, not only must minority children be prepared—their white contemporaries must learn to be at ease with people of color, to consider them their equals (and in many specific contexts, such as supervisor and worker, their superiors), and to cross the cultural boundaries created by different ethnic backgrounds.

White students raised in the isolation of all-white, or nearly all-white, small towns, suburbs, and city neighborhoods simply do not acquire the knowledge or attitudes that will allow them to participate constructively in the multiracial society they will face as adults. In short, for the good of the society, white children need to be in desegregated schools—or better yet, desegregated neighborhoods—just as much as minority children do. Though the issues are slightly different, similar arguments can be made for schooling that brings together more fortunate children with the one-fourth of school children, a large proportion of them white, who live in official poverty.

Magnet schools can desegregate across lines of social class, achievement, and race—and serve all their students well.

Innovation in education is a necessity for all students in a rapidly changing industrial society. In our society, it seems especially important for students whose families are excluded from the mainstream because of minority racial status, poverty, or both. These children generally achieve poorly in schools as they presently exist. Social scientists, such as anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath, have vividly demonstrated that schools are often radically discontinuous with the home life of poor children, both minority and white. Many such children feel forced to choose between the world of home and peers and that of the school. Not surprisingly, many choose their home worlds.

Older students may disengage from the school as their peer group questions the reality of the benefits school promises. John Ogbu, an anthropologist, has written extensively about this phenomenon among minority youth. Minority students learn from the experience of older relatives who have found that education has not brought steady employment or income for them as it has for their white contemporaries.

As our economy contracts, the discontinuity between life and school is beginning to spread beyond minorities. Much of the reform literature written about high schools suggests that a majority of students, those not heading toward somewhat selective colleges, is growing doubtful of the value of more than minimal compliance with schools' educational demands. Authors such as Michael Sedlak persuasively argue that the schools must make some significant changes if the large middle of our society is to be willing to become engaged with high school education.

From the progressive movement of the early 1900s to the local school initiatives of the 1960s, schools in our country have a long history of successfully using unconventional methods and content to engage students outside the mainstream in school learning. Magnet schools have the potential of carrying this history of innovation into the next century.

Magnet Potential

I first became interested in magnet schools after completing a study, published as *Classrooms and Corridors: The Crisis of Authority in Desegregated Secondary Schools*, in the course of which I spent a year in two desegregated junior high schools. I found that the teachers in those schools taught very differently when working with high-track, mostly upper middle class students, and with low-track, mostly poor students. Teachers with differing philosophies of teaching made similar adjustments in response to the behavior and skills of the students. In the low tracks, these adjustments often had more to do with control than

with teaching.

In analyzing these schools, I argued that the physical setting, daily routines, and set curriculum engendered control problems. These were easily managable with children who arrived at school with faith in school learning and whose faith was reinforced by success. But control problems were severe with those children who lacked trust in the significance of school knowledge or skill in acquiring it. Common solutions to these control problems undercut teachers' and students' engagement with learning, especially in the lower tracks.

After studying these desegregated, traditional junior highs, I was eager to look at magnet schools—to see what effects might result from changes in some of the nearly universal parameters of American schooling, such as the daily routine and the set curriculum. I was able to undertake this study of magnet schools in a large midwestern city I call Heartland. The study, reported at length in *Different by Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet Schools*, encompassed in-depth observation of the interior lives of three magnet middle schools, as well as consideration of the school district policies and politics shaping the development of Heartland's magnet schools over a seven-year period.

Two of Heartland's three magnet middle schools did indeed create significant changes in the traditional forms of schooling. As a result, the teachers and students in these two schools were able to develop much more constructive social relationships in support of their academic work together than were those in other schools I had seen—or most I had read about.

One of the magnet middle schools, Adams Avenue, had a student body that almost perfectly reflected Heartland, a blue-collar city, except that it was somewhat poorer. Well over half the Adams Avenue students were eligible for free lunch, and half of those entering sixth grade were reading at levels comparable to the bottom third of a national sample. At Jesse Owens, another of the Heartland magnets, more than two-thirds of the students were eligible for free lunch, and almost half were reading at a level comparable with the bottom quarter of a national sample (though math scores were somewhat stronger).

Both these magnet middle schools enrolled fewer than 400 students, and both modified traditional curriculum, grading practices, and classroom activities. Jesse Owens also had a modified daily schedule. Though they both altered traditional patterns in these common ways, their educational philosophies and curricular approaches were quite different.

Adams Avenue offered Individually Guided Education. In practice this meant that students progressed through a curriculum of carefully defined, skill-oriented objectives at their own pace, working in small groups with other children at the same level of skill. Students of all skill levels were assigned to each classroom, and then were divided into five or six skill-based groups. Teachers spent most of their time circulating among the groups. The skill-oriented curriculum was balanced with a set of learning activities that cut across subject areas, and with a rich extracurricular program in which the majority of students participated. Grades reflected progress and effort, with separate notations of a student's absolute level of accomplishment.

Student success must remain a scarce commodity as long as education is used to sort young people into careers with widely varying rewards.

Jesse Owens offered open education. Students spent most of their day in self-contained, multi-aged classes; they kept the same teacher throughout their middle school careers. Working with this teacher, each student developed individual long-term and short-term goals and programs of activity to meet those goals. Activities sometimes included working with others in a group. Projects integrating subjects were encouraged, and during much of the day students could move about the school using varied resource centers with staff available to assist them. Grades were given in the form of narrative progress reports.

Both Adams Avenue and Jesse Owens enabled low achieving students to make more sense of their education, and to experience greater academic success, than had similar students in the other desegregated schools I had studied earlier. Teachers also felt more successful. They came to know their students better as persons and were able to develop a more supportive, less discipline-oriented relationship with them than had been possible in the other schools.

Students at Adams Avenue and Jesse Owens came from diverse social backgrounds. There were students at both schools who were academically successful from entrance onward. Both teachers and students felt, for the most part, that these students' needs could be met along with those of the low achievers because the curriculum and structure of teaching and learning activities were designed to accommodate students with diverse backgrounds, knowledge, and speeds and styles of learning. Relations between children of different races were relaxed and positive. At Adams especially, there were many racially mixed groups in voluntary activities and many genuine friendships that crossed racial lines.

The Strength of Tradition

Adams Avenue and Jesse Owens strongly suggest that departure from traditional models of schooling can benefit children who have resisted school and done poorly. The schools also show that it is possible to educate these children together with those who have been more successful—with benefit to both groups. Adams Avenue and Jesse Owens demonstrate that magnet school innovations can have definite positive effects. They show that such schools can desegregate across lines of social class, achievement, and race—and serve all their students well.

Not all magnet programs make changes that affect students' alien-

ation—pressures to maintain traditional educational forms are strong. The third school in the Heartland study, a school for the gifted and talented, made no serious alterations in traditional school routines, curriculum, grading, or classroom activities. Nor was it supposed to, according to the blueprint given it by the central office. This school had more difficulty than Adams or Owens, both in reaching its lower achievers (most of whom would have been average or above in the other two schools) and in interracial relations.

Last year, as part of the work of the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools at the University of Wisconsin, I was a member of a team that visited eight "ordinary" schools in diverse communities for two to three weeks each. We discovered, consistent with the reform literature, that teachers in low- and middle-income schools were experiencing a lot of frustration with the unwillingness or inablility of large numbers of students to apply themselves to the traditional high school curriculum—and in some cases to comply with the schools' behavioral expectations. Virtually all the teachers and administrators were concerned with ways to change the students to fit the schools' routines and curriculums—which varied very little between settings despite enormous variation in the students' experiences, skills, and interests. Except in small changes at the margin, the administrators and teachers did not feel it appropriate to consider changing the schools' routines or curriculum to fit the students.

The teachers and administrators in these "ordinary" schools seemed to be voicing a deep-seated cultural assumption that the routines and curriculum that are generally standard across high schools form a definition—or at least a floor—for a "real" high school education. To innovate in ways that significantly alter either curricular substance or the organization of daily school life is to offer a second-rate, counterfeit education. As I consider what we learned in these schools, I see that something like magnet schools, with their official license and obligation to innovate, will be needed to create any serious innovation in high schools.

It would be naive, however, to expect great change through magnet schools. There must be good reasons why so many innovations that seemed effective in the 1960s and earlier have quietly disappeared. Strong social and political forces are pushing for standardized traditional schools—and against significant innovation. It is at least as likely that these forces will turn magnet schools into forms that differ little from other schools as that magnet schools will become dominant or have diversifying effects on other schools.

These forces are at work already. Many school systems define magnet schools as schools that emphasize a certain curricular area—rather than as schools that change the social structure, daily activities, or overall curricular approach of traditional schools. Heartland's Jesse Owens became ineligible for federal magnet school funds because it changed the style of education rather than the content. After the magnet schools were established, the Heartland school board sought to improve education throughout the system by requiring various pieces of standard "good practice." For example, they increased systemwide testing and adopted a single reading series to be used in all schools—decisions that severely undercut the magnet schools' ability to be innovative or distinctive.

Magnet schools do openly what affluent neighborhood and suburban schools do unofficially.

Magnet schools are often designed for students who achieve best and are organized around curricular emphases more likely to appeal to elites than to a cross section of citizens. In many communities, all or most magnets developed are schools for the gifted and talented, or high schools stressing math and science, or at best schools for the performing arts. These magnets often have entrance requirements. In Heartland, however, planners made a real effort to develop a series of magnet schools that, as a group, would attract children from all walks of life. On the whole they succeeded, though a few of the magnets did draw a definitely more affluent and highly achieving clientele than a cross section of the city.

Schools' Social Role

If it's true that culturally different children, children from low income families, and, increasingly, even children from solid blue-collar families do not prosper in traditional schools, why is there such resistance to adopting successful alternative patterns of schooling? Why should educators and the public shrink from the thoroughgoing educational change the magnet school idea can legitimate? Why should they often turn the magnets' potential for helping urban children in sore need of help into a way of enriching traditional schools for the more privileged children of a city? And when magnet schools are established, why are they so often resented and politically opposed by those not directly involved with them?

When educators discuss public schooling, they think of it as instilling the content of the curriculum and some of the social graces required to be a member in good standing of a school community. But education plays another very important role for society—it prepares the young to enter into adult roles. Schooling sorts the group of babies born in any year, looking very much alike in their hospital cribs, into a set of 18-year-olds divided into groups labeled as suited for very different kinds of occupational futures.

Imagine what would happen if some year the end that schools supposedly seek were actually accomplished. If all the graduates of all of the high schools in the country were successfully educated. If all scored in the 99th percentile on standardized tests and made perfect scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, not to mention having perfect "A" records throughout their schooling. Chaos would ensue: colleges would not have room for all these students, but they would have little ground on which to accept some

and reject others. Employers looking for secretaries, computer programmers, waiters, bus drivers, and factory workers would have jobs unfilled as every student considered such work beneath his or her accomplishments.

Good education, or students' success at education, must remain a scarce commodity as long as education is used to rank young people and sort them into occupational futures that yield substantially different intrinsic as well as monetary rewards. Society's recruitment of a work force proceeds more smoothly if only a relatively few students excel while others have varied success in school. Those who perform well have less competition when large numbers of others do not.

In the United States, we do not believe in passing privilege from parent to child. We expect individuals to earn the favored slots in society through talent and hard work; the schools are expected to be the judges of that talent and diligence. Thus it is important to our national sense of a fairly ordered social system that all children have an equal opportunity through education. The poorest child must have access to as good an education as the richest if we are to be able to say that educational success is a just criterion by which to award young adults a slot in the occupational hierarchy.

At the same time, education in this country is formally decentralized, officially the province of the states, and in many ways shaped by local school districts, which number in the hundreds in each state. How then to guarantee an equal education? By guaranteeing the *same* education. Educators have built a social reality around the idea of progress through the grades. It is supported by nationally distributed textbooks keyed to particular grades and nationally normed tests that report children's progress in grade equivalents.

We feel we are talking about something real when we say a child reads at the third grade level. Formally, a child who completes the fourth grade anywhere in the country should be able to move into the fifth grade in a different community without serious difficulty. In the same vein, our high schools have remarkably similar curriculums and requirements. Schools in quite different communities use the same textbooks for widely taught courses like geometry, American history, biology, and English literature.

To deviate from this pattern to design an educational setting around children's needs, interests, prior knowledge, or special aspirations creates two problems. It risks offering the child less than full educational opportunity. To deviate also risks offering less than a satisfactory credential—employers or colleges will not know how to judge graduates against those from other schools. The result may disadvantage ambitious graduates and confuse college admissions and industrial personnel departments.

There is an enormous irony in the anger magnet schools attract from parents and teachers in the rest of their school systems.

At the same time that schools are officially declared equal, middle-class parents and alert working-class parents diligently strive to place their children in schools where the education will be more than equal. It is widely recognized by such parents that schools are not in fact the same—that children changing schools may find the next grade much more, or much less, demanding in a different community.

Schools and Privilege

Parents usually regard schools that draw students from a higher social class as better. Peers are a crucial resource for each individual child, as teachers must teach to the level of the class. Both research and conventional wisdom indicate that group levels of achievement rise as social class rises and fall as it falls. Schools with budgets sufficient to provide additional visible resources or activities, often those serving higher socioeconomic groups, are also attractive.

That schools are not the same, despite the appearance of standardization, is such an open secret that realtors advertise houses according to their school attendance area when the school has a local reputation for high quality. Houses in such neighborhoods can cost thousands of dollars more than equivalent structures in neighborhoods where schools have a less sterling reputation.

Separate suburban school districts allow their residents far more control over the means to create superior schools based on the social class of the student body and the availability of funding. Ordinances requiring certain sizes for lots, or only single-occupancy housing, can keep out lower-income families. Fair housing groups across the country document the continued practice of racial steering by real estate agents; it can be used to keep suburban communities all or mostly white. Suburban districts also can take advantage of their higher tax base to offer higher salaries for teachers, small class sizes, richer stores of materials, and special programs in their "standard" schools.

Through my visits to secondary schools in a wide variety of communities, it is clear to me that the internal lives of high schools differ dramatically according to the socioeconomic status of their communities. Though the schools might offer the same courses—and even have the same books available—the substance of daily work, the stuff of classroom interaction, and the kinds of questions asked on tests are in no way comparable. The subtler stuff of atmosphere and expectations are worlds apart.

I am not suggesting that students alone determine the character of these schools; they emphatically do not. Teachers play a major role, one that can significantly improve the situation for low- and middle-income children. Still, the make-up of the student body is a major condition of school life that deeply affects teachers' and administrators' actions.

Differences between the schools of communities of differing social class are a reality that is widely recognized, but rarely mentioned in public discourse about education, except by those trying to get access to a better education for disenfranchised children.

As a political entity, Americans seem to live with this contradiction between officially equal education based on standardization of curriculum and activities, on the one hand, and tremendous variety in the quality and content of education arising from the linkage of public education to housing that is segregated by social class as well as race, on the other. In a process that political scientist Murray Edelman argues is common in many areas of our political life, we rarely see, let alone openly acknowledge, the contradiction between these two principles. Society's blindness to this contradiction serves the interests of the well-educated middle class who can claim that the young are rewarded according to merit—while placing their individual children in contexts where merit is far more likely to blossom than in those to which poorer and minority children find themselves consigned.

Magnet schools draw political fire because they bring this tacit contradiction to consciousness. In order to draw volunteers, they must be *formally* nonstandard, different from other schools. They thus openly and officially violate the rule that schools should be alike in order to ensure a fair race.

Worse, in order to induce volunteers to ride buses far from their homes and in order to induce whites voluntarily to participate in desegregation, these schools must be at least implicitly superior. They are often also explicitly so, with formal entrance criteria and notably richer resources than other schools.

Magnets under Fire

Magnet schools thus do formally, openly, and in public what affluent neighborhood and suburban schools do unofficially and inexplicitly. But because they do it formally, openly, and officially, magnet schools force communities to perceive and acknowledge their departure from equality through sameness and standardization. They draw fire for receiving extra resources and for creaming good students from a city's other schools.

These protests respond to symbolism more than reality. In most school systems there are not enough spaces in magnet schools to draw off significant numbers of leading students from each of the "ordinary" schools. Furthermore, were magnets not present, many of the ambitious families that use them would leave the city schools for the suburbs when their children reach school age, taking their tax dollars as well as children with them.

Differences in financial support between magnets and other schools are often relatively minor, but designed to be visible to parents considering the magnet schools for their children. They are consequently visible to everyone. Such amenities as a coat of paint, some extra computers, or even one or two additional support staff do not cost large amounts of money. In addition, these amenities are often paid for with funds from the federal government or business partners that would not be available to standardized schools. Nonetheless, in cities where financial needs are great, these visible amenities give the magnet schools an aura of privilege.

Powerful groups are able to arrange better opportunities for their children, despite the rhetoric of standard and therefore equal education.

There is an enormous irony in the anger magnet schools attract from parents and teachers in the rest of their school systems. Most magnet schools are less different from the other schools of a city system in both composition of the student body and available resources than are the schools of most nearby suburbs or even the schools of the city's outlying affluent neighborhoods. Especially where admission is not selective, magnets allow far more open access to students of all colors and economic backgrounds than do neighborhood and suburban schools, where admission requires money for expensive housing and white skin to get past neighborhood gatekeepers. While perceived as exclusive and elitist, they are in fact less so than are traditional "standard" schools in "good" neighborhoods and in suburbs.

In contrast, there is little public criticism, and apparently little public consciousness, of the fact that suburbs take money earned by parents in the cities to support exclusive, highly funded schools that are inaccessible to city children. These schools are informally different, not formally so. The incorporation of suburbs as separate communities with independent school districts blurs public awareness of the interdependence of social and educational processes in metropolitan areas as wholes. These arrangements also make suburbs inaccessible to traditional political pressures.

Reform for Diversity

Many of the efforts to improve the schools through increased centralized control and standardization of practice serve more to bolster the schools' legitimacy as agencies to decide children's fates than to increase their effectiveness in helping children learn.

If it were possible to overcome the formidable political resistance, I would recommend that we do away with separate suburban districts in metropolitan areas. Districts of a manageable size, slicing the metropolitan area like pieces of a pie, should replace them. Each should have a racial and economic mix approximating that of the metropolitan area. All schools should be racially mixed. Magnet schools with racial quotas, designed to attract socially and academically diverse students, could introduce innovation, smooth the adjustment to schools with diverse clienteles, and offer parents deprived of suburban privileges some sense of control over their children's fate through the right of choice. Parents distrustful of innovation could choose traditional schools, which would also be available.

But the pressures that keep American schools officially standard, yet radically differentiated along residential and therefore social and racial lines, make such reform practically impossible to implement. A prior and crucial step toward educational reform is recognition of the social processes

that underlie, and those that contradict, our societal faith in the value of a standardized education.

We must publicly acknowledge the schools' role as a crucial resource in individuals' competition for rewards in adult life. We must recognize the ways in which powerful groups are able to arrange better opportunities for their children, despite the rhetoric of standard and therefore equal education. Families with the economic and political power to give their children an advantage are unlikely to relinquish that advantage willingly. Most people with influence over public education have at least some measure of such an advantage and are surrounded by associates who enjoy it as well. They are likely to share a perspective that makes the maintenance of separate schools with superior human and material resources for the white middle class seem natural and necessary. Their vested interests are served by muting the recognition of differences in the opportunities offered by schools accessible to children of different races and social classes.

The claims of traditional, standardized educational routines and curriculum to be both beneficial and a road to equal opportunity run very deep. Parents of students in excluded groups are likely to accept the societal claim that succeeding at standardized education is the key to access to society's more rewarding occupations. These parents are not fully aware of the crucial informal differences between their schools and those in more privileged communities. They are likely to be suspicious of unfamiliar educational approaches as an attempt to give their children something second rate—something that will close doors, not open them. Nor are they wrong to be cautious. That danger is real if innovative education does not, in the end, develop better literacy, numeracy, and technical skills, as well as insight into art, literature, and society's workings, than does traditional education.

Reform that can help the increasing numbers of students from less powerful families will have to take place in the teeth of resistance from almost all social and political sectors. The fact remains that the long-term good of society—and therefore the welfare of each of us individually—depends upon educational reform that actually enables all children to learn to their fullest capacity in school. Such reform must bring socially and racially different students together and enable them to develop mutual understanding, which is crucial for both groups to function effectively as adults. It must emerge from the straitjacket imposed by the need for all schools to appear superficially the same. Our educational systems must develop divergent approaches that can draw all children—including the growing numbers of those alienated from the schools—into using and developing their minds and expanding their horizons.

For Further Reading

Classrooms and Corridors: The Crisis of Authority in Desegregated Secondary Schools. Mary Haywood Metz. The University of California Press, 1978.

This book analyzes the ways a diverse group of teachers and students understood the nature of classroom authority. It describes the conflicts and accommodations that resulted. It also shows how two schools with matched student bodies developed very different school cultures.

Different by Design: The Context and Character of Three Magnet Schools. Mary Haywood Metz. Methuen/Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.

This book describes the political and organizational struggles and adjustments surrounding the establishment of magnet schools in a large city. It explores the internal life of three magnet middle schools and identifies the most important influences that shaped the character of each school.

Effective School Desegregation: Equity, Quality, and Feasibility. Willis D. Hawley, editor. Sage Publications, 1981.

This is a collection of papers summarizing research on several aspects of desegregation. It is written for practitioners and policymakers.

The Next Generation: An Ethnography of Education in an Urban Neighborhood. John Ogbu. Academic Press, 1974.

This book describes community-school relations between a Black and Hispanic community and the public schools in a town in the agricultural valley of northern California. The schools are seen from the community's perspective.

Political Language: Words That Succeed and Policies that Fail. Murray Edelman. Academic Press, 1977.

This book analyzes the ways in which public rhetoric can evoke contradictory ideas in separate contexts. Policies shaped by acceptable political images may not accord with the realities they are supposed to affect.

Selling Students Short: Classroom Bargains and Academic Reform in the American High School. Michael W. Sedlak, Christopher, W. Wheeler, Diana C. Pullin, and Philip A. Cusick. Teachers College Press, 1986.

This book analytically reviews much of the voluminous literature on secondary school reform and analyzes the problems of the schools in the context of changes in the society which they cannot control.

"Success Dynamics of Public Schools of Choice." Mary Ann Raywid. *Content, Character and Choice in Schooling: Public Policy and Research Implications* (pp. 101-108). National Council on Educational Research, 1986.

This brief article identifies some general dynamics that appear important in making magnet schools lively places to work and learn.

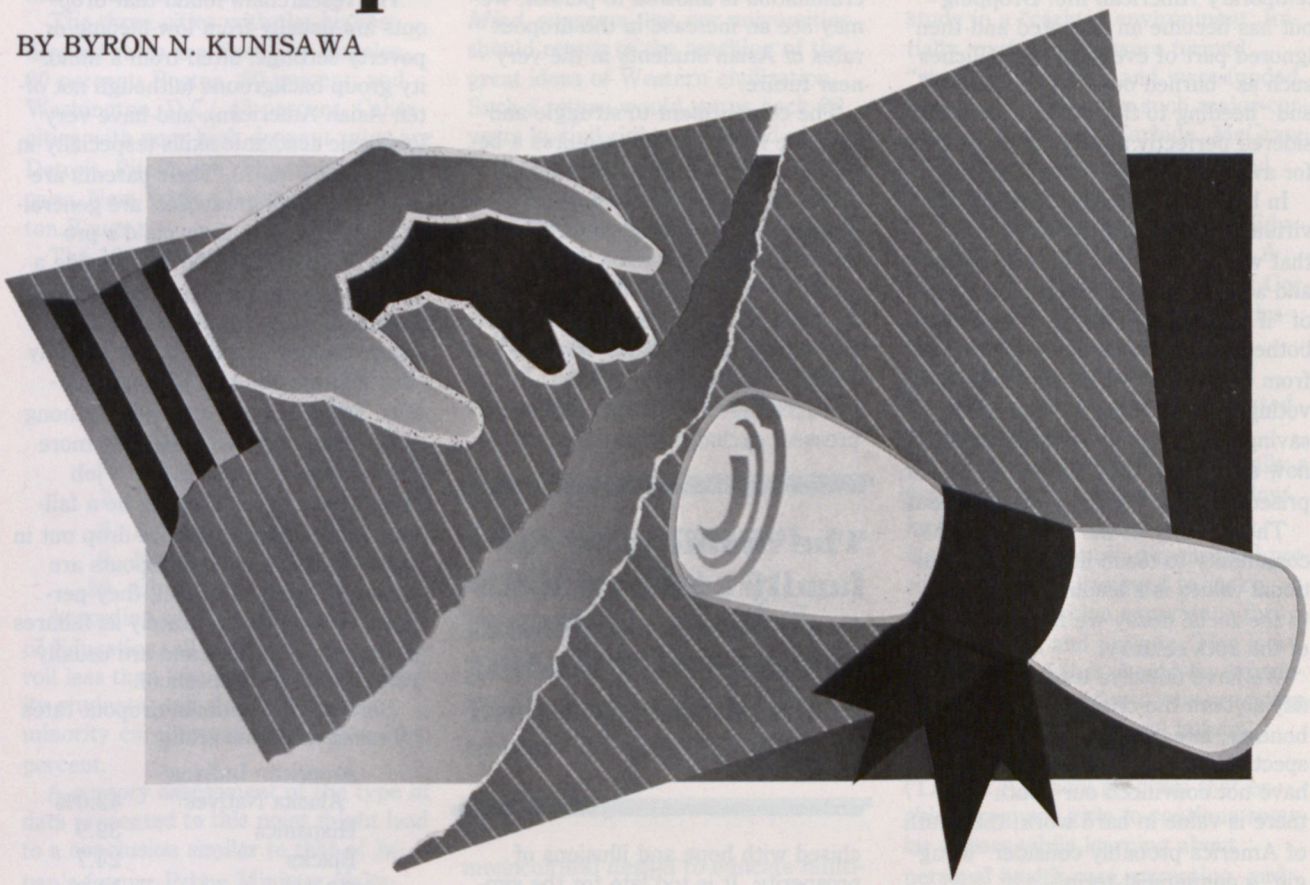
Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms. Shirley Brice Heath. Cambridge University Press, 1983.

This is a careful analysis of the ways teachers and children in desegregated schools in a rural southern community use language at school and at home. Heath shows how discrepancies in unrecognized patterns of language use can block young children from school participation and how teachers learned to develop bridges between styles of language use.

Part of the research on which this paper is based was supported by the National Institute of Education under Project No. 8-0640. Part was supported by the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools at the Wisconsin Center on Education Research which is supported by a grant from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement Grant #G-00869007. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Institute of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, or the United States Department of Education.

A Nation in Crisis: The Dropout Dilemma

BY BYRON N. KUNISAWA



Who's to blame for America's sky-high dropout rate, now over 25 percent? More important, what can be done to address the dropout problem and reclaim the nation's most valuable resource, our youth?

Byron Kunisawa is director of the Multicultural Prevention Resource Center in San Francisco. The Center specializes in providing training and technical assistance to educators and counselors. Kunisawa's classroom credits include stints with Canada College's Multicultural Institute and, as a reading specialist, with Stanford University's Right To Read program.

On April 26, 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, after assessing the current status of our public school system, issued the warning: "Our nation is at risk."

I disagree. When 25 percent of our students are dropping out and 14 million more are graduating functionally illiterate, we are not "a nation at risk," we are "a nation in crisis."

The impact of this national disgrace is already beginning to be realized:

- 52 percent of dropouts are unemployed or receiving welfare.
- The annual cumulative cost of dropouts to American taxpayers is $75 billion in welfare benefits and lost tax revenues.
- 60 percent of prison inmates are high school dropouts. (The annual cost for housing each inmate is $15,000, which is roughly the annual tuition for Harvard, Yale, or Stanford.)
- 87 percent of pregnant teenagers are high school dropouts.
- The elimination of dropouts in America by 1988 would enable the United States to wipe out the entire national debt by 1990.

But these statistics merely represent a sample of the devastating impact dropouts have on our society. We must take a closer look to fully comprehend the magnitude of the problem and avoid the unthinking response: "Incompetent teachers."

Why Do They Drop Out?

Dropping out is not solely the fault of the American educational system, but is in fact a phenomenon of contemporary American life. Dropping out has become an accepted and then ignored part of everyday life. Cliches such as "burned out," "stressed out," and "needing to find myself" are considered perfectly appropriate reasons for avoiding difficult situations.

In less than 50 years, America has virtually abandoned the work ethic that was a cornerstone of this society and accepted a hedonistic philosophy of "if it feels good, do it...if not, why bother?" Many of us have dropped out from everything—marriage, parenting, voting, church-going, paying taxes, saving for the future, employment, and now education. Why should we be surprised that our young people drop out?

The inability of the family and the community to teach its children traditional values is a leading contributor to the social decay we face at the end of the 20th century.

We have failed to teach many of today's youth the critical importance of honesty, integrity, responsibility, respect, trust, and commitment. We have not convinced our youth that there is value in hard work; the youth of America probably consider "struggle" a communist term.

Many youngsters, regardless of gender, color, or income, come to school woefully unprepared for the rigors of learning and the frustrations of accompanying setbacks. When the effects of economic inequity, racism, sexism, or class rivalry are added, then one sees a clearer and more complete picture of what today's educational experience is like for low-income, ethnic minority, and female students. Moreover, the larger society—and not just schools—has destroyed its credibility by breaking treaties, contracts, codes of ethics, and laws for human and civil rights.

Consequently, youth, especially ethnic minority youth, have little confidence in the deferred gratification that education promises, or the mythical guarantee that a diploma translates into equitable career/employment opportunities. Even academically successful Asian students are experiencing the backlash of institutional racism—they're required to score 18 points higher on the SAT than other applicants to enter some Ivy League universities. If this blatant form of discrimination is allowed to persist, we may see an increase in the dropout rates of Asian students in the very near future.

The commitment to struggle and sacrifice for the future requires a belief that such a future holds some value. How can schools be solely responsible for reducing the dropout rate when the incentives they are selling seem to be mere illusions—"pie in the sky?" Teachers are the modern-day version of Sisyphus—and the boulder gets larger every day.

Educators cannot motivate the oppressed, excluded, and disenfranchised with hope and illusions of prosperity. It is too late for the simplistic "role-model" theory to deter dropouts. The question for many students today is not why drop out, but why not?

The inability of the family and community to teach traditional values is a leading contributor to social decay.

Dropout Characteristics

A little history. The problem of school dropouts is not new. Statistics indicate that the public education system has indeed made enormous progress in the reduction of the dropout problem. In 1900, a mere 17 percent of school-age children graduated from high school. By 1935, this had increased to 35 percent. In 1965, 66 percent of American students completed high school, and in 1980, 75 percent graduated.

We have progressed quantitatively in increasing the number of high school graduates, but we have deteriorated at a commensurate rate in the *qualitative* characteristics of these graduates.

A 1986 longitudinal study of U.S. high school students conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics produced the following general characteristics of the dropout:

The researchers found that dropouts are usually from low-income or poverty settings, often from a minority group background (although not often Asian-American), and have very low basic academic skills (especially in reading and math). Their parents are not high school graduates, are generally uninterested in their child's progress in school, and do not provide a support system for academic progress. English is often not the major language spoken in the home, and many dropouts are children of single parents. Dropout rates are higher among males than females. Males are more likely to leave school to get a job (which usually turns out to be a failure), while females tend to drop out in order to have a child. Dropouts are generally bored in school; they perceive themselves accurately as failures in the school culture and are usually very alienated from school.

Here are the national dropout rates by racial or ethnic group:

American Indians/ Alaska Natives	42.0%
Hispanics	39.9
Blacks	24.7
Whites	14.3
Asian/Pacific Islanders	9.6

These national figures do not hint at the severe local dropout rates that in some areas are as high as 90 percent for American Indians and 78 percent for Hispanics.

The statistics about dropouts offer some clues to why students leave school, but they do not provide a true composite picture.

To understand this deeper picture, we need to look first at the 10 states with the *highest* dropout percentages.

1.	Louisiana	43.7%
2.	Alabama	37.9
3.	Florida	37.8
4.	New York	37.8
5.	Mississippi	37.6
6.	Georgia	36.9
7.	California	36.8
8.	South Carolina	35.5
9.	Arizona	35.4
10.	Texas	35.4

All of these states have ethnic minority enrollments that exceed 25 percent of the student population, and six of them have minority enrollments of more than 35 percent.

The three cities with the highest dropout rates are East Los Angeles, 60 percent; Boston, 50 percent; and Washington, D.C., 45 percent. Other cities with very high dropout rates are Detroit, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, Cleveland, and Baton Rouge.

The 10 states with the *lowest* dropout rates are:

1.	Minnesota	10.7%
2.	Nebraska	13.7
3.	North Dakota	13.9
4.	Iowa	14.0
5.	South Dakota	14.5
6.	Wisconsin	15.5
7.	Vermont	16.9
8.	Montana	17.9
9.	Kansas	18.3
10.	Ohio	20.0

According to the U.S. Department of Education, all of these 10 states enroll less than 20 percent ethnic minority students, and six of them have minority enrollments of less than 10 percent.

A cursory assessment of the type of data presented to this point might lead to a conclusion similar to that of Japan's former Prime Minister Nakasone, who observed last year that America's competitiveness dilemma is the result of ethnic minorities' failure to become educated.

This sort of conclusion, derived from a misinformed source, is simply a case of the "blame the victim" syndrome, a way of thinking that has plagued underserved and underrepresented segments of the population for years.

The key to the dropout dilemma is first to understand the complexity of the problem, then to assess which institutions must actively participate in its resolution.

Back to Whose Basics?

Today's educational system largely dysfunctions in a society as technologically complex and culturally diverse as ours. If our democratic society depends on our youth to be the future, then we may not have a future.

Supporters of the current "back to the basics" movement have the right idea but the wrong blueprint. Allan Bloom, author of the controversial bestseller *Closing of the American Mind*, suggests that our universities should return to the teaching of the great ideas of Western civilization. Such a return would set us back 20 years in civil rights gains and place us back in the pre-ethnic studies era. The teaching of such classics would return us to the monocultural format which would mean great literature and classical music would again be limited solely to European artists.

This dominance of European culture in fact reflects accurately the current educational system, which uses a monocultural design to educate multicultural and multilingual students. This design is culturally incompatible with students and forces teachers to work in a structurally inappropriate format.

Educators cannot motivate the oppressed, excluded, and disenfranchised with hope and illusions of prosperity.

The right back-to-basics blueprint requires a return to the drawing board to redesign the educational system for a multicultural, multilingual student population.

At the same time an effort needs to be made to redesign education to meet the needs of a changing and highly technological society.

Systemic change of this magnitude is a long-term venture, but to do anything less is futile. After all, *the problem is not dropouts; the problem is a dysfunctional education system that produces dropouts.* To move in a direction of resolution rather than mere accommodation will require a multi-dimensional approach.

There are programs throughout the country designed to prevent dropping out and increase academic skills, including:

- Cities in Schools: A national business-and-schools partnership integrating work experience and academic study in a "caring" environment. Initially, partnerships were termed "street academies," and were funded almost exclusively by such major corporations as Union Carbide, McGraw-Hill, American Airlines, IBM, and First National City Bank.
- Cooperative Federation for Educational Experiences (COFFEE): A partnership of Digital Equipment Corporation and the Oxford, Massachusetts, public schools. COFFEE provides alternative occupational training that offers computer-related work experience.
- Head Start Program: Originally a preschool program designed for low-income "at-risk" students. Today Head Start is a multi-dimensional preschool program designed to make schooling a positive experience for both children and parents. This is a national effort that should be expanded to reach all students who are potentially "at risk" for school failure.
- Teenage Parent Program (TAPP): A school program that enables pregnant girls to continue regular classes while learning about personal health care, parenting, and infant care in a supportive atmosphere. Students also have access to medical services.
- The Boston Compact: A unique business-and-school partnership that targets jobs to students who improve their performance in school. The goals of the Compact are straightforward: a specified number of private-sector summer jobs for graduates, annual measurable improvements in student attendance and dropout reduction, and the adoption of competency-based graduation requirements in basic skills.

These programs are exceptional and often produce extraordinary results because they do not place the entire responsibility for motivating potential dropouts with the schools. They involve the school and business communities in this critical effort.

But it is essential that we not simply label these successes as model programs and attempt to duplicate or

clone them in every school district. School systems must begin a building process, utilizing the core components of model school programs to build more model schools, which will ultimately lead to the building of model school systems.

This process of establishing a technological and multicultural educational system should include, but not be limited, to the following steps:

- Ensuring equity in per-pupil expenditures for all schools regardless of location and student population.
- Teaching with accurate sources that put in proper perspective the contributions of non-Europeans and women to cultural and historical developments.
- Specifying what the functions of the schools should be.
- Identifying the academic, social-cultural, business, and economic skills required for full participation in a quickly changing, technological society.
- Utilizing ethnic and cultural demographic statistics to ensure a cultural compatibility between education programs and student populations.
- Establishing specific and legitimate professional requirements for teachers and administrators, with commensurate salaries and benefits.
- Ensuring that the cultural make-up of teaching and administrative staffs is congruent with that of student populations.
- Establishing programs to identify sources of funds to pay for higher education for all qualified and aspiring students.
- Creating proactive alternative programs for the future, rather than reactive alternative programs for the past/present.

These actions are essential to any new educational system, but they won't happen unless there is strong support for such an effort. And we will need to answer these hard questions: What is the plan? Who will develop the blueprints? Where will funding come from?

Moving Forward

The National Foundation for the Improvement of Education (NFIE), the nonprofit foundation set up by the National Education Association, has developed a bold approach to dropout prevention, called Operation Rescue. This effort offers both a blueprint and a process for attacking the dropout problem. Operation Rescue is not *the* solution, but it does go in the direction that is needed for substantive change. It involves more than simply educators and concerned parents in planning, design, process, and participation.

We need to redesign our current educational system to accommodate the personal, cultural, and economic needs of students and to help them with their higher education and career aspirations. To do this requires advice from professionals—economists, computer scientists, environmentalists, cultural sociologists, financial planners, and futurists—formerly on the periphery of the educational system.

The problem is not the dropouts. The problem is a dysfunctional education system that produces dropouts.

To make such a comprehensive transition involves field-testing model school designs that incorporate exemplary programs—curriculums, instructional methods, support services—and encourage cultural diversity among students and staff. With the emphasis here on the "new breed" educator, some attrition among existing teachers and administrators can be expected. Throughout the transition to this new institution, multicultural education specialists, cross-cultural researchers and evaluators, university deans and professors of education, and administrators and teachers from successful alternative education programs will all be important participants.

Our educational system's more innovative responses to the high dropout rate, illiteracy, and fiscal inequities among schools (though largely reactive in nature) nevertheless can help us in the transition to new successful institutions.

Summing Up

The educational system of today, like our economic and political systems, is becoming increasingly antiquated and dysfunctional. There are no simple solutions to complex institutional problems and the ills they have produced.

The high percentage of dropouts among school-age young people is not only a sign of the times, it is a vote of no confidence for the future of our nation. This bleak future is the future of today's adults as well. Our retirement programs are dependent upon support from the next generation of taxpayers. Within the next 20 years new workers will be primarily Black, Hispanic and Asian. What will happen to this country if that multicultural generation has a school dropout rate of 30-40 percent and a teenage unemployment rate of 70-80 percent?

The schools should develop a bumper sticker with the following message: "An investment in your schools is an investment in *your* future." It's clear that the dilemma of school dropouts has broader social and economic impact than most Americans realize, yet only their full commitment and participation will help us out of the dropout crisis.

We must look at dropouts as a social cancer that will require the active participation of all constituencies and institutions to eradicate.

Certainly we must not allow the disproportional numbers of Black, Hispanic, and American Indian dropouts to be used as a convenient scapegoat for the ills of our educational system.

When our society is willing to accept the loss of a generation of young people, then we will have lost more than dollars and dropouts, we will have lost the heart and soul of a nation.

We must accept that we are an aging and declining society that requires a rededication and commitment to support the full development of all our youth socially, culturally, educationally, economically, and spiritually. For if we fail to rededicate ourselves now, after we have celebrated the 200th anniversary of our Constitution, it will

become self-evident that "we the people"—not the students—have ultimately dropped out.

For Further Reading

"All One System: Demographics of Education—Kindergarten Through Graduate School." Harold Hodgkinson. Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc., 1985.

This article chronicles—in condensed format—data on how illiteracy and the dropout problem affects everyone in America. It offers clear explanations of why staying in school and gaining a college education are problems for some ethnic groups.

Dropping Out of School in New York State: The Invisible People of Color. The Taskforce on the New York State Dropout Problem. Commissioned by the New York State African American Institute of the State University of New York, 1986.

This report provides an in-depth analysis of why so many Latino, Native American, and African American youth drop out or are pushed out of the New York State school system and offers some strategies to reduce their disproportionate numbers.

"Dropping Out: The Ideology of School and Work." M. Fine and P. Rosenberg. *Education Digest*, April 1984, pp. 26-29.

This article describes the problems facing dropouts when they look for work and compares the importance of getting a high school diploma for male and female students of different races.

Illiterate America. Jonathan Kozol. New American Library, 1985.

A comprehensive description of the illiteracy problem in America, covering both students and functionally illiterate adults. Kozol provides personal and professional descriptions in a very readable style.

Reducing the High School Dropout Rate in California: Why We Should and How We May. David Stern. University of California-Berkeley, Institute of Governmental Studies, 1986.

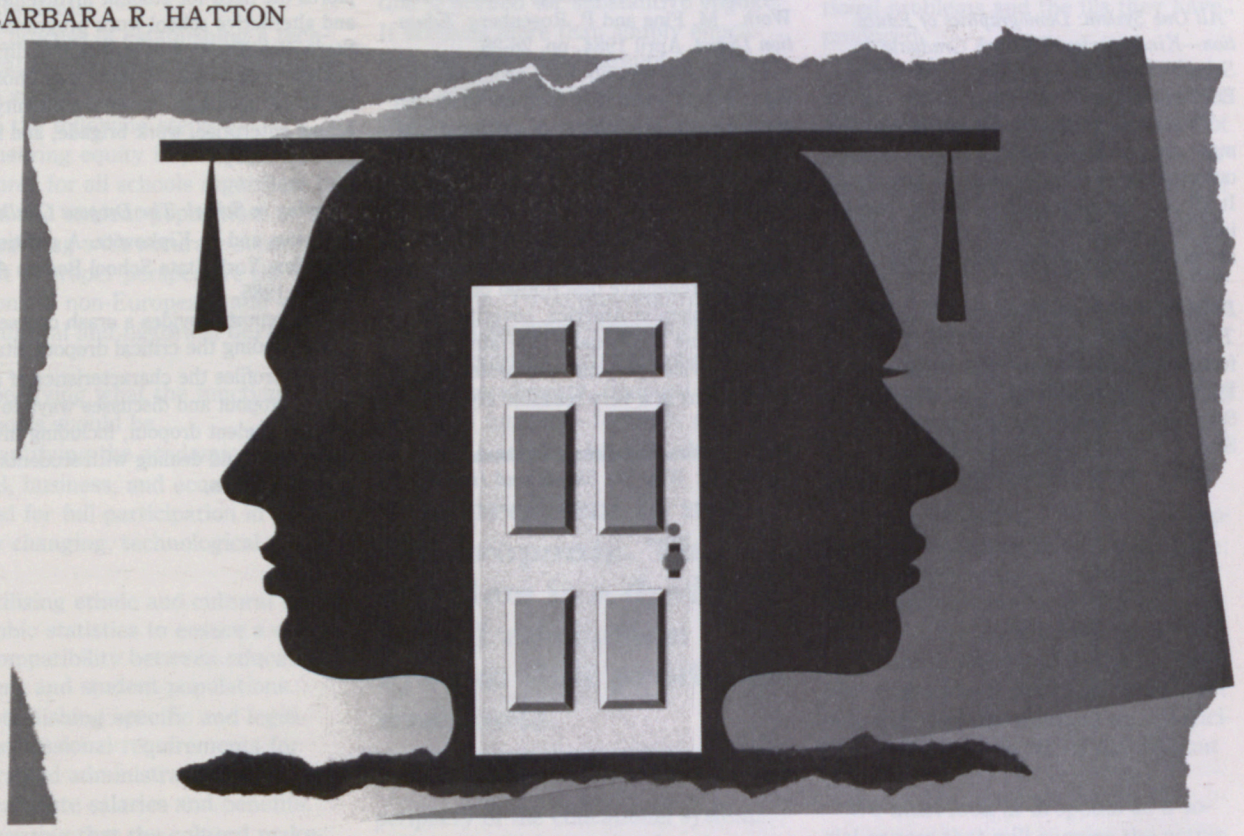
This report provides the multiple reasons why students of all races and backgrounds drop out of school. The report further explores the need for student involvement and alternative school-work programs. Stern identifies and describes five different models from which students may choose: the street academy, caring community, school enterprise, work brigade, and independent study.

"Staying in School: The Dropout Challenge." J. Bowen and D. Kipkowitz. A position paper. New York State School Boards Associaton, 1985.

This report provides a crash course in understanding the critical dropout situation. It profiles the characteristics of a potential dropout and discusses ways to prevent student dropout, including involving parents and dealing with students' social problems.

A Game Plan for Ending The Minority Teacher Shortage

BY BARBARA R. HATTON



Current education reforms may improve schooling for some students, but they're leaving many minority students behind. Having more minority teachers is a prerequisite for progress.

After beginning her career as a high school math teacher in Atlanta, Ga., Barbara Hatton taught at Stanford University and Atlanta University before becoming a professor and dean of the School of Education at Tuskegee University in Alabama. Hatton recently served as chair of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and a member of the Commission for Educational Quality of the Southern Regional Education Board.

Among the recommendations of the current education reform movement are proposals to increase high school graduation requirements, elevate college admission standards, and inaugurate projects to improve teacher certification procedures, performance, and status. All these recommendations are intended to make sure students get the best education possible. But these proposals, more and more educators understand, must be carried out with care if they are to benefit all students.

In other words, care must be taken to ensure that our schools achieve both excellence (the stated goal of current reforms) and equity (the purpose of earlier reforms). Education policymakers need to take steps to ensure that reforms benefit most those minorities and other groups considered primarily "at risk" in our schools and colleges. If educational progress is to be measured by uniform standards of performance in all schools, no progress will be shown—and reforms will be assessed as ineffective—unless these reforms increase the effectiveness of the educational experience for all students.

Reform and Minorities

During the early stages of the current reform movement, some educational leaders were able to use reform measures to promote organizational change, to set high expectations for all students, and to encourage the development of particularized strategies to

meet the special needs of students.

In many instances, however, the way the early reforms were carried out frustrated the longstanding goals of increasing the performance and raising the college enrollment rates of minority students. Consider the emphasis on raising admission standards and assessing student achievement. Some educators and educational institutions have taken these measures as an incentive to simply screen out those students who do not meet the new standards.

Several recently published reports have documented that the 1980s have been a period of stable or declining numbers and proportions of minority students in colleges and universities. The Southern Regional Education Board, in its report *The Enrollment of Black Students in Higher Education: Can Declines Be Prevented?*, states unequivocally that if present trends continue, fewer Black students will be enrolled in college in 1990 than today and Black students will make up a smaller proportion of overall college enrollment. An earlier report by the American Council of Education documents similar patterns of enrollment for Blacks and other minority groups.

Within this larger trend is a sharp drop in the number of Black and other minority education graduates. This is clearly related to another basic reform strategy: the elevation of standards in teacher education programs in order to improve the quality of teachers. Efforts here have been devoted to using teacher certification tests to screen out so-called incompetents and using test results to evaluate teacher education programs for state accreditation purposes.

In the short term, these efforts have not resulted in the positive consequence of having more Black and other minority students meet higher standards. Black enrollment in teacher education programs has declined at double the rate of overall teacher education enrollments at member institutions of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education. And minority teacher candidates have much lower passing rates on required certification tests than their white counterparts. Not incidentally, then, the percentage of minority teachers in the teaching force is declining—at a time when the percentage of minority pupils in the nation's schools is rising.

Black College Impact

The impact of current reforms on historically Black colleges and universities is critical to any discussion of the shortage of Black teachers. While the majority of Black and minority college and university students are enrolled in predominantly white institutions, a significant share of degrees earned by Blacks is awarded by historically Black institutions. Colleges and departments of education at historically Black institutions have trained and continue to train the majority of Black elementary and secondary teachers who work in our public schools.

Some educators and educational institutions have taken reform measures as an initiative to simply screen out those students who do not meet the standards.

The historically Black institutions have been severely affected by the public identification of Blacks and other minorities as unlikely to pass required certification tests and secure professional placement. Along with relatively low pay and poor working conditions in public schools, such identification may have served as a further deterrent to Black and minority students considering a teaching career, whether they are enrolled in historically Black or predominantly white institutions. Moreover, as historically Black institutions retrench, this continuing identification may inspire them to limit or close their teacher education programs. To the extent that this occurs, the potential for addressing the shortage of Black teachers is diminished.

Unfortunately, few predominantly white institutions have had sufficient incentive to invest significant resources in attacking these issues. While some active projects in predominantly white institutions are making progress, the fact remains that problem-solving projects and research on quality and access for Black teachers are most likely to succeed in or in collaboration with historically Black institutions. But this is not a "Black" problem, that is, a problem which should only concern Blacks and Black institutions of higher education. It is a professional concern.

Access to any profession should depend purely on ability—and ability should not be assessed only by measures of one's success in past educational experiences. Most importantly, a fundamental precept of the education profession is that educators know how to identify and develop potential. If educators become convinced that schools can and must be better, that there are intellect and ability in the Black community, and that there is a clear responsibility for educational institutions to develop that talent, then the preparation of minority teachers would be accorded a status among professional affairs that communicates this significance.

In the short term, most of the historically Black institutions that have teacher preparation programs have set up well-conceptualized strategies for improving their programs and their students' test performance. And several efforts targeting other minority groups have been reported. These efforts can be expected to maintain a small, steady flow of qualified minority teachers. They cannot, however, be expected to produce enough teachers to correct the projected imbalance in the teaching force. Current education reform efforts must include strategies—including incentives to colleges and universities—to increase the numbers of qualified minority teachers.

Providing Alternatives

National commissions on teacher education have recommended extended preparation—either a baccalaureate degree in the arts and sciences and a graduate degree in teaching or a five-year degree program providing for more study in the arts and sciences. While these models will provide

strong training programs, they are not the only effective model for teacher preparation—and they are likely to provide additional barriers to increasing the numbers of minorities in teaching. Further, they are expensive to provide—Black colleges and small liberal arts colleges will probably have difficulty offering them at a competitive level.

Such colleges have suffered competitive disadvantages on other occasions when regulatory agencies have mandated professional changes. If they are now to provide the new models of professional training, they need help. Foundations and corporations should encourage and support consortia of Black and small liberal arts colleges in providing extended preparation. And while the consortia test alternative preparation and certification processes, the colleges should maintain their existing preparation models that have proven effective.

At the same time, a national certification process is being developed that can be expected to provide a basis for fundamental change in the way teaching competence is developed, assessed, and ultimately employed in schools. Such a process is badly needed, but previous efforts to improve entry screening through assessment procedures have not been able to overcome the bias inherent in current testing procedures. The developers of the new certification process should be held accountable for developing a process that does not discriminate against minorities. Colleges and universities are demonstrating every day that students can be trained to pass an unfair test, but the institutions should not have to do this. The intellectual energies dissipated in the effort to get students through unfair tests could be better used in activities designed to improve the act of teaching.

Tests and assessment procedures should not be eliminated. They should be improved and used to help students monitor their performance and challenge their achievement. Particular populations may require diverse approaches, but neither educators nor society should lower the expectation that teacher candidates who have completed rigorous preparation programs can ultimately teach well. The minimum competency standard of current certification tests should never become the goal for any teacher preparation program.

Neither should these tests be allowed to become barriers that simply do not exist in other professions attractive to minority young people. We need to employ early identification and support strategies in order to help potential minority teachers overcome these barriers. To ensure that extended (five-year) programs do not become additional barriers for Black and other minority students, financial aid and loan forgiveness programs are essential to minimize the loss of opportunity.

Colleges and universities are demonstrating every day that students can be trained to pass an unfair test.

Instead of punishing colleges and universities for the poor performance of students in certification examinations and assessments, thus encouraging them to simply screen out students who may not succeed easily, state agencies carrying out reforms should reward institutions for developing students to meet high standards. Carrying out performance standards for teacher preparation programs from this value-added perspective makes colleges more likely to explore alternative preparation models that can increase minority access to the teaching profession.

Building a Minority Pool

Simply put, minority groups must have more effective schools in order to produce more college applicants—and more successful college students. In other words, increasing the number of students in the education pipeline will produce more potential applicants for teaching programs.

Accountability for providing the more effective schooling that will increase the pool rests with government, the private sector, the minority community, and the schools themselves. But policymakers, in their efforts to avoid so-called race-specific policy, have been reluctant to pinpoint responsibility for the effectiveness of today's schooling for minorities. Ultimately, the responsible entities have no real impetus for the collaborative efforts necessary.

Recent changes in accreditation processes will make schools more accountable for educational outcomes. These efforts are to be applauded for the effect they may have in the long term—but effective short-term, collaborative strategies are needed as well. As an example, schools and colleges might solicit support from philanthropic organizations and corporations or pool institutional resources to conduct a nationwide talent search (similar to programs conducted for gifted students) for potential minority teachers. If a number of liberal arts and teacher education institutions were to agree to furnish summer preparatory activities for selected high school and college students, such a talent search could significantly expand the pool of minority teachers.

Encouraging Minorities

Teaching differs from other professions in that everyone who has ever gone to school has seen firsthand the unprofessional conditions teachers face. This is doubly true for minority youngsters, who are more likely to find poor teaching situations in the schools they attend. A basic argument underlying current education reform strategies seems to be that highly qualified people will again be attracted to teaching when there is improvement in the professional environment for teachers, including increased pay, autonomy, and better career opportunities. The focus is on making the profession attractive to those who might otherwise choose careers that appear to be more rewarding—and most other professions seem more rewarding.

Other factors also discourage minority young people from entering teaching. Minority community leaders often tout careers in the technological areas at the expense of the social service and human development areas. They encourage and reward students for ex-

pressing interest in engineering, business, and other lucrative occupations from which minorities have historically been excluded or in which they've been underrepresented. Since at the same time minority enrollment in college has not increased substantially, these rewards have simply drawn part of the student population away from the liberal arts and human services to business and technology.

To attract large numbers of highly qualified people into teaching, then, not only must professional conditions be improved but minority youngsters must get more support from people they respect for choosing teaching as a career. Successful recruitment strategies for Black youngsters must concentrate on early identification and group support. Early selection and early entry through special programs (cadet programs, for example, or mentoring and tutoring programs) should be implemented while the recommended strategies for improving the profession are being carried out.

These programs should be developed in such ways as to increase knowledge about education as a profession for minorities among both students and the communities from which they come. Otherwise, minority students will not be available to take advantage of new teaching opportunities when these are developed. The prospective adoption of a five-year, graduate-level model of teacher education requiring an investment of more time and resources for the promise of rewards yet to be developed makes a carefully designed early identification and support strategy all the more important.

Long-Term Agenda

Education reformers are proposing multi-level organizational patterns for assigning and compensating teachers on the basis of their preparation, experience, and competence, with a view to assuring career opportunities for teachers within the profession. Such plans typically cause anxiety among teachers because of the potential for discrimination. To ensure that minority teachers have an equal opportunity to participate in these new professional opportunities, continuing professional development must be provided in an equitable manner.

For the long term, meanwhile, an appropriate research agenda on minority recruitment into teaching must be mounted in and among historically Black institutions and in collaboration with predominantly white institutions. Such an agenda might focus on:

- experimenting with different patterns of extended preparation.
- developing more effective processes for identifying teaching talent among minority pupils.
- stimulating incisive and informed curriculum development to incorporate diverse approaches to making the college experience effective.
- determining the sensitivity of minority students to changes in the rewards and incentives of the teaching profession.
- developing value-added measures to assess the effectiveness of the minority educational experience.

These research efforts are essential to inform future educational reform efforts and finally make possible the achievement of the twin goals of quality and access in the teaching profession.

For Further Reading

"The Critical Issue of Excellence and Equity in Competency Testing." G. Pritchy Smith. *Journal of Teacher Education*. March-April, 1984.

This article discusses and proposes solutions to the problem of achieving equity and excellence through competency testing.

"Teacher Supply and Quality in the South: A Search for Strategies and Solutions."

A report on the consultation on teacher supply and quality convened by the Southern Education Foundation, September 12, 1986, Atlanta, Georgia.

Teachers' Totter: A Report on Teacher Certification Issues. Mary E. Dilworth. Howard University Press, 1984.

A discussion of how the competency test movement will affect the supply of Black teachers and of the viability of teacher training programs at Black universities.

Legislating Reform: The Texas Experience

BY CARL A. PARKER

In 1984, the Texas legislature enacted a package of major reforms. Some—including smaller class sizes—have run into trouble for lack of financial support. An insider's view of what's happening.

Texas State Senator Carl Parker chairs the Texas Senate's Education Committee. Parker was a leader in the fight to enact the sweeping Education Reform Bill of 1984, a measure that attracted nationwide attention. His tenure in the legislature goes back to 1963, when he was elected state representative from Jefferson County.

Education reform most certainly can be effectively legislated. People can also travel to the moon. Both are costly and difficult to do.

What will effective education reform cost—and are we willing to pay for it? Americans enthusiastically supported John Kennedy's call to win the race to the moon. Few, if any, taxpayers questioned the expenditures, and most responded with patriotic commitment. The issue was clear, the opponent visible. We had to beat the Russians.

The education of young Americans is no less critical to this nation's future than was the space race. Unfortunately, the opponent is not so visible nor the risk so apparent.

Though not as dazzling as a Russian sputnik, the landmark 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, entitled *A Nation At Risk*, was a call for reform that stimulated more public debate than ever before in this nation's history on the quality of public education.

In response to the call, 48 states have made education reform a part of their legislative agendas during the past four years. But only a dozen states have enacted sweeping legislative mandates. These have been primarily in the South (Louisiana,

Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, North and South Carolina, and Texas)—where low student scores on standardized tests and even lower teachers' salaries gave a special impetus to reform efforts.

A close examination of the reform effort in Texas clearly demonstrates that education reform can be effectively legislated. After exactly three years of the new lower teacher-pupil ratios mandated in primary grades by the Texas reform law, third grade students' average scores on basic skills tests have risen 13 percent. There have, of course, been failures as well. But those failures are evidence not of the impossibility of legislating reform, but rather of the public's unwillingness to pay the costs.

A blueprint produced by a nonlegislative entity in Texas has been of great assistance to us in undertaking legislative reform of education. The Texas Select Committee on Public Education, established in 1983 and chaired by H. Ross Perot, functioned to allow public involvement, to capture public attention, and, most important of all, to educate its own members and the general public. This Committee recommended a dramatic new role for the legislature, a restructured state education agency, a new state board of education, and greater accountability of local school boards to the central administration.

As the Texas Select Committee's hearings proceeded, you could see the attitudes and views changing before your eyes. At the outset, I heard so much about the superiority of the Japanese education system that I wondered how we had managed to win World War II. But as the hearings wore on, many of the conservative members of the business community who served on the committee grew less enthusiastic about the Japanese system—they were learning of the substantial pay and high degree of unionization of the Japanese teachers.

Yet substantial pay is not always the stumbling block among reform-minded decision makers. Scholarly blueprints for education reform and reports of select committees and blue-ribbon panels generally recommend adequate rewards for teaching. All too often, however, the clear logic of attracting and keeping the best with adequate pay and benefits yields to the hope of quality through some unproven gimmick such as teacher testing, or another new teaching fad. These are prime examples of how the unwillingness to pay can hinder the ability to enhance the quality of education through legislation.

We will never have uniformly high-quality teachers in our schools until the base pay is as attractive as that of beginning accountants or engineers. There will never be waiting lines of bright high school graduates applying to colleges of education until all teachers are compensated comparably to other professionals.

After expressing these sentiments at an education symposium at Baylor University, I was approached by one of my fellow Baptists. He pointed out that teaching, like preaching, is a calling. I quickly agreed but inquired of him how many preachers he knew who had been "called" to lower-paying churches? We *can* legislate adequate benefits for those in the teaching profession, but we must be willing to bear the cost.

Our failures are evidence not of the impossibility of legislating reform, but rather of the public's unwillingness to pay the costs.

Competing Teachers

I admit I'm disappointed when I hear teachers say that systems that provide differential rewards for performance in the classroom create terrible morale problems and distrust among the teachers. Because of keen competition for additional stipends, some teachers charge, colleagues will become less cordial; friendship is replaced by acrimony.

I doubt seriously that this is true. Nevertheless, differential compensation for higher standards of performance—whether it be called merit pay, career pay, career ladder, or master teacher program—should be carefully developed to avoid subjective or preferential treatment and to prevent divisive attitudes among teachers.

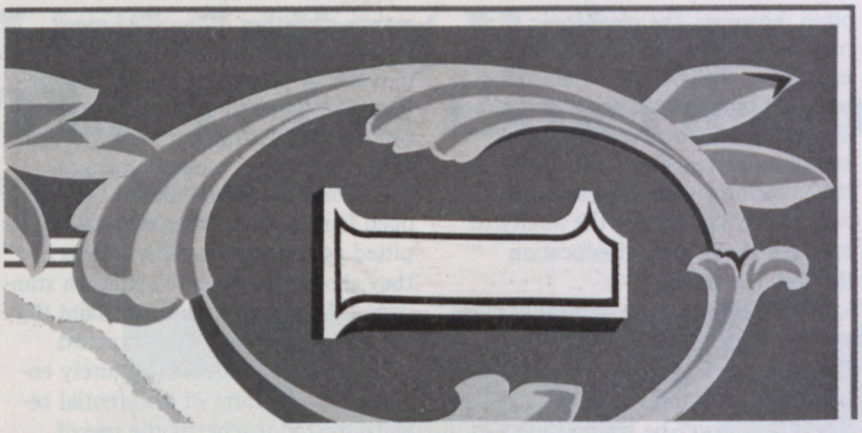
Uniform standards must be developed fairly, and teachers should not be pitted against one another; rather, they should all compete against a standard. The number who can claim the reward by attaining this standard should not be limited. Absolutely essential to any form of differential reward for the teacher is the use of evaluators skilled in observation, knowledgeable of good teaching, and able to justify with objectivity the criteria used in their evaluation.

Another form of competition is favored by those who assert that teacher competency and quality can be ascertained by tests. Teacher testing is popular with quick-fix artists and those who would blame classroom teachers for all the shortcomings in American education.

Texas recently spent several million dollars to learn that approximately 99 percent of the state's teachers could read and write. The exercise produced a great deal of animosity and stress among teachers but revealed little about teacher competency and did almost nothing to enhance it. Few if any states could afford to develop and validate a battery of tests, necessarily vast in number, to test the multiple disciplines that are part of the public education system.

In recognition of this dilemma, the Texas legislature recently repealed the subject matter portion of its mandated teacher test. The costs that were incurred to institute the tests to begin with did not correspond with the benefits gained in the long run.

Despite education's natural affinity for testing, ask yourself what large employer in the private sector monitors employee quality by wholesale testing? Supervision, observation, and evaluation are the critical tools used in quality control of private industry personnel. Employees are judged on objective criteria that is for the most part related to their work—punctuality, faithfulness in attendance, productivity, and professionalism. More often than not, professional employees are



compensated commensurate with management evaluation of their performance.

A major difference between most segments of private industry and public education is the difficulty in measuring productivity of public education systems. The number of widgets produced by a manufacturing plant can be counted easily by a plant manager who can affix a per-unit cost. The same cannot be said for the "products" of the education system.

Some want to assess education by making student achievement testing a major factor in teacher evaluation. The flaw in this approach is that a valid test would have to be developed—and administered with sufficient frequency—to measure increments of student achievement fairly. Teaching only one course would involve measurement by one test; while teachers having responsibility for multiple subjects would need to have students measured by multiple tests. The development and validation of such tests would be difficult if not impossible. The cost would be astronomical and not offset by resulting benefits.

So long as humans are involved in the evaluation process, some measure of subjectivity will exist. But subjectivity must be removed as much as possible, and any evaluation system must be perceived to be fair by the majority of those subjected to it. Otherwise it is doomed to failure—even if only in the ill will it creates. Perhaps a "value-added" approach would come closer to giving a true picture of education system productivity—but even this approach has its limits. Numerous studies have already shown that educated Americans earn far more over their lifetimes than the less well educated. Unfortunately, it's much more difficult to put an exact dollar amount on how much education adds to a person's skills and therefore his or her earning power.

There will never be waiting lines of bright high school graduates applying to colleges of education until all teachers are compensated as adequately as other professionals.

Pulling Together

Public education must be a cooperative effort. The role of each component, from taxpayers to teachers, must be clearly defined, understood, assigned, and left to function without undue influence from the others. Here's how I would define each role.

Taxpayers. Legislators can force taxpayers to pay the cost of quality education—however, the taxpayers are in fact the boss and have the ultimate weapons with which to retaliate: tax rollbacks and turning the "rascals" out of office.

State legislatures. Legislatures should provide broad policy denominators and objectives for quality education. Legislative bodies are seldom citadels of educational expertise and are generally ill-suited for micro-management of school business. Before we dwell too much on the level of quality among senators and representatives, however, we should pause and reflect on why we call our system representative government.

State agencies. State boards and commissions should and can, with legislative authority, develop standards for teacher certification, text materials, and curriculum. A state agency should provide oversight, coordinating local effort, auditing expenditure of funds to ensure equity of funding, and monitoring the quality of curriculum and other programs on a regular basis. State agencies should adopt and promulgate regulations only after conducting extensive public hearings and soliciting advice and counsel from all segments of the education community.

Local school boards. Local boards of education should provide local funding, set local policies for the administration of individual schools and districts, and set personnel standards suitable to the local community and employees to conform with state regulations.

Administrators. School administrators should serve as academic leaders in the roles of principals, planners, and innovators. School administrators should also act as providers of resources and services to those directly involved in delivering education to the students.

Teachers. Teachers should teach instead of taking on the miscellaneous tasks we sometimes assign them. We can and should legislate a framework whereby teachers are afforded adequate time to be students as well as teachers, constantly upgrading their knowledge and skills, and reserving adequate vacation time to avoid burnout and frustration. Teachers should not be lunchroom baby-sitters, bus monitors, or schoolyard patrollers. For example, duty-free lunch hours for Texas teachers have finally been created through action of the legislature.

Students. In our zeal for excellence, too often the student—the ultimate object of the entire exercise—is forgotten. While a desire to learn cannot be mandated and parental guidance is not always present, legislation can establish minimum standards to somewhat

compensate for these lacks.

I don't think it's a good idea to dictate curriculum by statute. I prefer to mandate certain broad guidelines for quality, and leave broad discretion in the state education agency, so that rapid changes in learning techniques are not required to wait for the sometimes cumbersome legislative process.

Occasionally, legislation can assist students greatly in focusing on what is truly important in their public school career. Texas's legislative "no pass, no play" mandate, which restricts participation in extracurricular activities to students whose grades are *70* or above, was far from universally loved. This law was not intended to attack high school athletics. It was, however, a reaction to several bizarre situations discovered by the Select Committee—such as the case of the young man who missed several weeks of school while showing his prize chicken at various county fairs and poultry competitions. The provision makes clear that student achievement in class must come ahead of extracurriculars. And reports from many school districts say "no pass, no play" is working.

Places To Learn

School environments conducive to learning can be provided by legislation, but again only if we are willing to pay the cost. One early victim of taxpayers' unwillingness to support a portion of the Texas reform effort was alternative education. Problem children were removed from the classroom where they interfered with fellow students' ability to learn, and were placed in special classes. Districts were assigned to provide ongoing education for these students rather than boot them out of school or shuffle them into juvenile programs. As a result of local outcry, centered primarily on the expense of alternative education, the program was aborted. Consequently, because citizens were unwilling to pay the price of the program, the state's dropout rate has risen to 35 percent and now ranks ninth in the nation.

When it comes to an environment conducive to learning, perhaps no issue is as paramount as class size. The Texas Select Committee on Public Education heard much evidence that a teacher-pupil ratio of 15 to 1 or better produced dramatic results in primary grades. Even so, cost factors prevented legislative requirements of "ideal" teacher-pupil ratios, leading to adoption of a less costly ratio of 22 to 1 in primary grades. Even this modest advancement to enhance the learning environment has been under siege because of its cost. Legislative provisions to hire elementary school counselors, who could cure many ills, never have been seriously considered in Texas because of cost.

It would be remiss not to suggest that the environment conducive to learning does extend to the home. Robert C. Christopher, author of *The Japanese Mind,* attributes the success of Japan's education system to family pressure. I strongly suspect that the decline of family influence in America is one of the most important factors affecting our nation's schoolchildren. Latchkey kids, single-parent families, social permissiveness, chemical abuse, and countless other phenomena add to the difficulties of providing quality education.

The public school, however, still presents our best opportunity to compensate for such social pressures and shortcomings. It would be foolhardy to think laws can establish good family relationships, prevent drug abuse, eliminate poverty, or ensure good grammar, but we can legislate a school environment that is pleasant and conducive to learning.

No other nation's education system is challenged as ours is. Democracy demands that opportunity be our byword.

Equal educational opportunity need not dictate a mediocre education system. We can and must legislatively mandate and fund programs for our most gifted children. At the same time we need to avoid shortchanging the not-so-gifted. Mortimer Adler, author of the *Paideia Proposal,* best defines the proper goal of a public system of education: "All minds are like containers of varying sizes; our system must be able to fill the smallest or largest to its capacity."

Education reform not only can be legislated, it *must* be legislated. As to the cost, we pay now or we pay later.

For Further Reading

Edgewood ISD et al. v. Kirby et al., Travis County District Court Case No. 362,516 (June 1, 1987).

This is a state court version of the Rodriguez decision (see below) and represents a current challenge to the Texas school finance system under the state constitution. Unlike Rodriguez, it establishes education as a fundamental right. The court has determined that the Texas public education funding system is unconstitutional because property-poor districts do not have the ability to raise and spend monies per student equal to the amounts available for students in property-rich districts. This issue will undoubtedly be in the forefront of the deliberations of the 71st Texas Legislature when it convenes in January 1989.

Evaluating State Education Reforms: A Special Legislative Report. Michael W. Kirst. National Conference of State Legislatures, 1987.

This special report, about key education issues discussed by legislators, analyzes ways to evaluate state-level policymaking. The last chapter gives the whole truth about comparing the achievements of U.S. students to those of students in other countries, and explains why doing so is often like comparing apples to oranges.

The Japanese Mind. Robert C. Christopher. Fawcett Press, 1984.

This book, written by a former correspondent who lived in Japan for many years, examines the Japanese society and discusses the Japanese education system.

The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto. Mortimer J. Adler. Macmillan, 1982..

In this first of a three-book series, Adler explains his belief that all children should study the same educational curriculum, consisting of language, literature, fine arts, mathematics, natural sciences, history, geography, and social studies.

San Antonio ISD v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 4, 93 Sp. Ct. 1278 (1973).

This important Supreme Court decision established that education is not a fundamental right because it is not expressly provided for in the U.S. Constitution. The decision also recognized that simply abrogating any district's present system does not ensure that a new one would be more equitable unless the state allocates substantially more money for education. The Supreme Court, although not overturning the Texas system of education, gave fair warning that it was far from perfect and in serious need of repair.

Who Should Control Our Schools?

BY MICHAEL W. KIRST

The politicians want to call the shots at the state level. But researchers tell us that the best decisions are the ones made at the school level—by principals and teachers.

Michael Kirst is chair of administration and policy analysis at Stanford University's School of Education and codirector of the think tank Policy Analysis for California Education. He has had an extensive careeer in government, including positions as president of the California State Board of Education and staff director of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Manpower and Poverty.

The past 30 years have seen a transformation of the source of control of America's public schools. Local school districts have slowly lost discretion over education policymaking to state legislatures and bureaucracies. And within local districts, school sites—that is, individual schools—have been losing discretion to central offices. There are sound reasons for this trend, including concern about academic standards. But the gradual shift in control has progressed to the point where the unintended results—including negative impact on teacher autonomy and professionalism—may undermine the original goals. It's time to reassess decisions about which level of education should control what.

In order to decide whether we're allocating authority over education decisions in the most effective ways, we must look at why the higher or more central levels in policymaking have lost confidence in the lower or more local levels. Second, we need to examine alternative ways of defining the balance of control.

I proceed from a belief that the state level should have a major role in establishing a core curriculum but that more local flexibility is needed to adapt school policies to varied needs and better utilize the staff ability at the school level.

The provision of schooling is a pow-

er not mentioned in the U.S. constitution; it is thereby reserved to the states. Although state governments legally have primacy in matters of education, state constitutions and legislation have traditionally delegated important decision-making power to local school districts. This is because in the early years of the Republic, Americans feared distant government and wanted important decisions made close to home. The doctrine of local control of public schools occupies a revered place in American political ideology. Even so, state court decisions support the right of a state government to abolish any school district or to take over its management and dismiss local officials. States have almost never exerted this right, but recently a loss of confidence in local education authorities has weakened the commitment to local control of education.

Loss of Confidence

The loss of confidence in local school districts has occurred over many years. In the mid-1960s, federal and state authorities argued that local school districts were not being held accountable for student achievement. At the same time, groups that had traditionally supported local schools—for instance, local chapters of the PTA or the American Association of University Women—became less influential. Replacing them were new interest groups, the local expressions of nationwide movements in areas such as civil rights, women's roles, student rights, and bilingual education.

In response to the new influences, federal and state authorities set up categorical aid programs to earmark funds for the education of subgroups that had been neglected or underrepresented in local politics. Such groups included handicapped, disadvantaged, gifted, and limited-English-speaking children. States also increased the funding earmarked for special needs such as vocational education and rural schools.

By the 1970s, beleaguered local policymakers found their discretion over decisions decreased. A declining student population and spreading resistance to increased school taxes further constrained local initiative and options. States assumed more of the burden of financing public schools (state expenditures on education now exceed local expenditures by about 6 percentage points). But more state control followed the new state dollars.

The mid-1970s were also the peak period for federal and state court decisions that assumed school districts could not be trusted to guarantee student rights or due process. Lawsuits directed at local authorities multiplied. Discontent about academic standards for students, evaluation of teachers, and curriculum quality led states to prescribe stricter, more uniform standards for teachers and students. These would be achieved through such approaches as accountability and minimum competency testing. By the end of the 1970s, policymakers, business leaders, and the public in many states were disillusioned with professionals in general and educators in particular.

It's time to reassess decisions about which level of education should control what.

Then in 1983 *A Nation at Risk*, the highly critical report on public secondary schools in the United States, was released. Since then concern about the quality of American education has exploded. Unfortunately, this new interest demonstrates a loss of confidence in the local capacity to maintain high academic standards. The period has been characterized by an intense response on the part of the states that threatens to shift control of education in ways that may diminish teacher autonomy and professionalism. Intrusive state policies include tougher high school graduation requirements; the revision and alignment of textbooks, tests, and curriculums; the upgrading of teacher qualifications; the creation of career ladders; the provision of teacher incentives programs; and a revamping of teacher evaluation.

In sum, the most striking feature of state/local relations in the last 10 years has been the continued growth in state control over education. Today the national and local organizations of professional educators are making suggestions for only marginal change in state initiatives initiated by governors, legislators, state superintendents of education, and the business community.

Who's in Charge?

Local school districts' discretion in decision making will continue to shrink unless measures are taken to restore confidence in local authorities and increase their policymaking capacity. From the top, superintendents' discretion has been squeezed by the increasing influence of the federal government, state government, and even the courts. Moreover, the influence of private interest groups and professional "reformers," such as the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation, has increased. Other national—but not federal—organizations such as the Educational Testing Service, the Education Commission of the States, and the Council for Exceptional Children have also increased their influence over education policy.

From below, superintendents and local boards find their area for decision making reduced by the presence of local special interests. These interests include community groups, such as parents of special needs children, and other agencies of local government, such as police and health agencies. Collective bargaining contracts negotiated by local teacher unions and reinforced by their national organizations also reduce superintendents' authority.

In addition, part of the legacy of the 1960s has been tremendous growth in specialized functions of the school. This has increased the number of administrative slots for specialists in such areas as vocational education, special education, health, and remedial reading. These new structural layers dilute the influence of the superintendent and local school board. The salaries of these specialists come in part from federal or state categorical program funds, which helps insulate them from the superintendent's influ-

ence. The allegiance of the specialists is often to the higher levels of education governance rather than the local district.

This does not mean that the local superintendent and school board are helpless. Rather, it means they cannot control their agenda or structure the outcomes of decisions as they could in the past. The golden age of the superintendent has passed, with profound consequences for administrative control. The state-based reform strategy that began in 1983 will intensify all these trends favoring nonlocal influences on education policy.

It is simplistic to characterize this changing governance structure as "centralization." In fact there is no single central control point, but rather a fragmented "elevated oligopoly." The issue is not so much centralization of policy influence as it is the progressive loss of discretion by local school boards and administrators. The central offices have begun to fight back, but their most recent policy move has been to take back control over curriculum content and staff development from the school sites. The justification: establishing academic standards.

State-Level Influence

State initiatives on curriculum are a good example of the potential impact of state-initiated reform on teacher decision making. These moves raise significant concerns about conflict between teacher autonomy and state demands for accountability. In the past, states left curriculum decisions largely to local discretion. State legislatures and departments of education were satisfied with specifying a few required course titles and issuing advisory curriculum frameworks for local consideration.

The new state focus is on curriculum quality and ensuring that teachers have the appropriate capabilities to teach a curriculum that includes critical thinking and other higher order analytical skills. Moreover, new state and local curriculum policies, such as the alignment of curriculum with texts and tests, reinforce and interact with each other in such a way as to expand the potential for affecting teacher decision making. Once again the traditional subject matter organizations of educators—in math and English, for example—and major education lobbies, including NEA and school administrator groups, are mostly in a reactive mode, as the state reformers initiate new curriculum policies.

This aggressive state academic role is a direct result of the highly critical analyses of local education standards that characterized *A Nation at Risk*. States see education as a crucial component of their economic growth and international competitiveness. Governors and legislators are impressed by arguments that local school officials have permitted academic standards to drop, have been inattentive to the need for teaching higher order skills, and have been slow to create a more complex curriculum. Anticipated economic competition is believed to require a breadth and depth of curriculum that local school officials seem unable to provide.

Unfortunately, the urge to reform education results from a loss of confidence in the local capacity to maintain high academic standards.

While the scope of state education activity is very wide, the actual impact of state influence on local practice has often been very little. The alignment of curriculum and other elements of education is one approach states are using to more tightly control local curriculum and overcome local capacity to thwart implementation of reform.

California offers a good example of the alignment technique. The goal is to have the same curriculum content emphasized and covered across the state. To accomplish it, related aspects of educational activity—curriculum frameworks, student achievement tests, textbook adoption criteria, school accreditation standards, college entrance course requirements, teacher evaluation criteria—are made congruent with the desired curriculum outcomes.

A major concern for teachers is whether these increased state initiatives change the teaching context and, if so, whether they enhance or detract from teacher autonomy and professionalism.

Problems of Local Boards

School boards have been subjected to an unprecedented attack during the 1980s. State policymakers at the start of the reform era in 1983 contended that local boards were neglecting academic standards, curriculum policy, and teacher evaluation. Many political observers believe the local school board is in trouble. I believe, however, that local school boards are deeply embedded in American political culture and are here to stay.

A 1986 study by the Institute for Educational Leadership found very strong public support for the concept of the local school board as an institutional buffer to protect local schools from domination by the state on the one hand and by local education bureaucrats on the other. At the same time, the public rarely turns out for school board elections in greater numbers than 10 to 15 percent of the eligible electorate, and it knows very little about the role and function of school boards.

Board members are seriously concerned about the growing intrusiveness of the states as the reform movement evolves. Additionally, local boards continue to grapple with problems in the necessarily gray area between the board's policymaking and the superintendent's administrative responsibilities. State governments have lost confidence in the ability of local school boards to set high curriculum standards and evaluate teachers. Consequently, state laws have focused on these policy areas.

Effective Schools

Some of the so-called "effective schools" research has identified an inherent tension between a strong state and central district role and the flexibility needed for individual schools to be effective. Other observers believe that centralized and standardized poli-

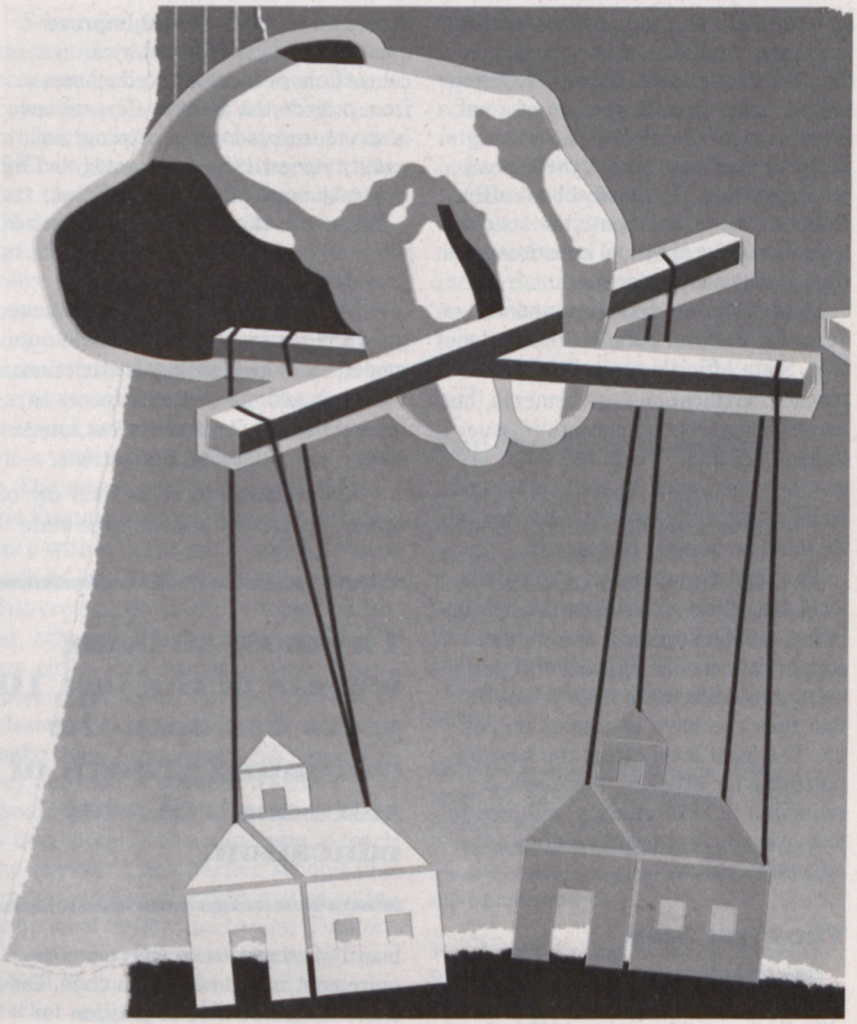
cies can increase the effectiveness of individual schools.

Higher educational standards imposed by the state appear consistent with the effective schools research. Both approaches emphasize defining clear curriculum objectives and preferred instructional content and outcomes. Much of the effective schools literature suggests, however, that the most significant improvements in student achievement are the result of increasing school site responsibility. One way to reconcile these opposing tendencies is for the state or district to emphasize desired outcomes in broad terms and not prescribe content or procedures in detail. Except for a common core of skills and knowledge, state education departments and local districts should encourage individual schools to develop their own distinctive characters. Using a teamwork approach, the teachers at each school site can pursue shared educational goals. The current all-out push in many states to specify detailed content and methods (for example, requiring so many minutes of writing) may not yield optimal results.

The same problems arise when one considers school effectiveness plans put forth by local school districts. Usually the central office prescribes standard tests, curriculum guides, and even textbooks. Such alignment of education elements holds promise for improving standardized test scores, but what effect will it have on distinctive and positive school climates that already exist? In the past, school site autonomy has allowed a few outstanding schools to find their own best strategy. Of course, at the same time other schools have been left free to continue their poor performance.

In the current climate of crisis there is a rush to mandate new, effectiveness-oriented reforms. But state omnibus statutes that include 40 or more separate reforms do not embody reform in a systematic or interrelated fashion. Rather, individual legislators have their own favorite ideas that are tacked on to the statute as if by staple gun. Missing from these action plans is any underlying notion of what really drives classroom teaching performance.

In sum, the effective schools literature suggests a mix of top-down and bottom-up control in education. There isn't any one best system to be imposed from the top. But neither is it likely that a bottom-up initiative alone will turn an ineffective school around. Overall the effective schools literature provides a warning about excessive centralization at either the state or the central office level. The current challenge is to rethink the institutional choices that we have already made, by analyzing the purposes and mission of the schools and sorting out which levels have the capacity to best serve the students.



Why Decide Locally?

There are numerous and conflicting positions on the question of how well local school politics meets the democratic ideal. The issue is whether local political control of schools is more democratic than federal or state control.

In general, citizens have greater opportunity to affect policy in their local district than they do at the federal or state level. Local policymakers serve fewer constituents than state or federal officials and are much closer to citizens psychologically as well as geographically. It's time-consuming and difficult for citizens to get to the state capital or to Washington.

Local school board elections provide a means to influence local education policy that is much more direct than an election for a state legislator, who represents many local school districts on a much wider variety of topics. In the thousands of small school districts, a significant proportion of the community residents personally know at least one school board member. Local media provide better information and can capture the attention of citizens more effectively than reports from a distant

state capital. This is not to claim that local school politics even approaches the democratic ideal. Indeed, a Gallup poll revealed that 36 percent of a national sample of citizens knew "very little" or "nothing" about their local public schools. But local school officials can better anticipate the zone of tolerance of local school constituencies than state policymakers can.

Most states are too large and diverse for uniform policies to be effective. State officials typically prescribe teacher certification requirements, but leave hiring and compensation issues to local decision. There are large areas, however, such as civil rights and equal opportunity, where local flexibility must be greatly restricted.

The final argument for expanding local discretion is based on the link between political efficacy and public support of schools: citizens will participate in politics more if they believe that they can have an impact on policy. The local level offers the best opportunity for efficacy; therefore, a reduction in local efficacy will lead to less overall citizen participation in education policy.

The First Step

One technique for increasing local flexibility is to design state policy specifically to encourage local initiative. One such policy, California's School Improvement Program (SIP), is an encouraging example of a new mode of school governance. Unlike past state aid approaches, SIP funding is neither for basic maintenance nor for categorical projects. Instead, SIP supports an individual school's assessment of its own needs and its design and implementation of a program to address these needs. The fundamental concept is that the school and its local community, rather than the district or the state, should take primary responsibility for setting local improvement objectives.

SIP has two key components: a school site council and a program review. The school site council is composed of parents, staff, and (in secondary schools) students. The council governs the way SIP funds are used in the school.

The program review is an assessment of a school's School Improvement Program conducted by a consortium of local-level educators from outside the district. The review is structured according to program quality review criteria promulgated by the state department of education.

States can take other actions, in addition to instituting a SIP approach, to provide more local flexibility.

- Many state education codes have grown incrementally and include outmoded and needless local restrictions. States should appoint task forces to review their codes and cut out unnecessary and outmoded regulations.
- States should increase their use of waiver policies by allowing the state board of education to waive any requirement in the education code. Districts should be able to petition for exemptions from the state code, and the burden of proof should be on the state to justify why a waiver cannot be granted.
- States should remove limits on local revenue-raising that preclude localities from voting for tax increases or that establish a pass requirement of more than a simple majority.
- The legislature should pass and enforce laws requiring state authorities to fully fund programs or activities they mandate at the local level.
- States should provide model curriculums to local districts and use statewide tests to assess whether a limited common core of knowledge has been covered locally. States should *not* specify the pace at which teachers should present content (for example, what should be covered in which week) or spell out the details of local curriculum.
- States should review the aggregate and cumulative effect of their policies on teacher autonomy and professionalism. It is not any single regulation that is crucial but the totality of the state role.

The most striking feature of the last 10 years has been the continued growth of state control over education.

Stronger Local Boards

In a preceding section, I sketched major problems with school board effectiveness as well as noted the strong public commitment to the concept of a local board. Clearly, given that continued public support, the issue is how to strengthen the school board rather than to eliminate or diminish its role.

- School boards should construct strategic plans that provide a framework for long-range policymaking.
- School board members need more systematic training during their terms of office. Most school board preparation programs are merely updates on current events rather than skill-building exercises in the area of budget or curriculum planning.
- An effective board should develop a procedure for evaluating its own performance and, in consultation with the superintendent, should reaffirm separate areas of administrative and policymaking responsibilities.
- State school board associations need to work with teacher organizations and other education groups to initiate state education policies rather than merely react to proposals made by state officials.

Central Office Role

Many U.S. school districts are very small, and the distance physically and psychologically between central office and school sites is correspondingly small. But when districts reach enrollments of over 15,000 students, problems arise as to who should control decisions in the local context. Central offices must perform certain functions, such as establishing the length of the school day, raising and allocating revenue, planning for enrollment, reporting to state and federal authorities, and providing district-wide programs, including special education and staff development. Most central offices go beyond this minimal role, however. They specify much of what

must happen at the school site—including curriculum, content, and, in some cases, even specific teaching methods.

There are several criteria for deciding what should be done centrally and what should be done at the site. My own views have changed over the past decade to favor more centralization over decisions about curriculum content because of my concern about academic standards. Many individual schools lack the resources for curriculum planning and development, such as devising a new science or social studies curriculum. Many of these tasks are best completed through a committee of teachers and staff from many schools coordinated by the central office.

The main arguments for moving decisions to the school site are probably not that they are more economical or cost effective. Education policy researcher Henry Levin of Stanford posits other advantages for decentralizing decisions to the school site.

- District policies are typically made in a uniform fashion that ignores the enormous variety in student needs and characteristics from school to school.
- Teachers and other school-based educators may not accept responsibility for educational outcomes that they did not establish.
- The teaching talent at the school district level is underutilized through centralized control that permits teachers few decisions.

There are several mechanisms for devolving control from the district to the school site. *School site budgeting* provides substantial and unrestricted funds to individual schools, allowing staff to decide the mix of resources they will use. Also, *personnel decisions* can be returned to the site (although they rarely are).

School site governance is yet another mechanism. Most governance schemes include a site council. The council membership is inevitably embroiled in controversy because of such difficult issues as (a) dealing with the fact that teachers are in the majority, (b) deciding the appropriate role of the principal, and (c) deciding how to involve lay persons. There is no one best system, but given the recent history of education governance, I favor more school site flexibility in such areas as budgets, teacher evaluation, textbook selection, and student services such as counseling.

The recent proposals of the Carnegie Forum stress more teacher influence within the school through devices such as lead teachers and peer review that create new roles for teachers. So far, other than in isolated cases in a few cities, little has been done about these suggestions. Perhaps NEA's Mastery in Learning Project will help make these ideas more widespread. A key question is whether teachers should be the main influence on what is taught (content) and/or how to teach the content. The effective schools literature stresses the principal as an instructional leader and benign dictator. This is a very different concept from a school site council controlled by a teacher majority.

In the mid-1970s, I advocated a majority of lay persons on school site councils. But this concept conflicts with the Carnegie notion of building a "true teaching profession" through larger spheres of teacher autonomy. It is unclear what school site governance arrangement is optimal, and more experimentation is needed. But this issue, like most others in this article, is more an issue of conflicting values and philosophy than of technical feasibility.

While centralization may be better for naval units, steel mills, and state highway departments, the effective schools literature suggests that the most important changes take place when those responsible for each school are given more responsibility rather than less. That is to say, it is important that principals, teachers, students, and parents at each school share a "moral order" in which they assume control of their own destiny, rather than a mentality in which they see themselves as controlled by distant and unreachable forces.

For Further Reading

The Changing Politics of School Finance. Neida H. Cambron-McCabe and Allan Odden, eds. Ballinger, 1982.

The Fiscal, Legal, and Political Aspects of State Reform of Elementary and Secondary Education. Van D. Mueller and Mary P. McKeown. Ballinger, 1985.

Both books focus on school finance politics.

Educational Administration and Policy. James W. Guthrie and Rodney J. Reed. Prentice Hall, 1986.

The authors provide an integrated discussion of educational governance, politics, and administration.

The Organization and Control of American Schools. Roald F. Campbell. Merrill, 1985.

Campbell describes the system of school control at all government levels.

The Polity and the School. Fred Wirt. D.C. Heath, 1975.

Wirt gives an overview of research articles on school politics published in the 1970s.

Schools in Conflict. Fred Wirt and Michael Kirst. McCutchan, 1982.

A most complete overview of school politics, with a revised edition to be published in spring 1988.

Who Controls Our Schools? Michael Kirst. W. H. Freeman, 1984.

An easy-to-read, fully illustrated book about school politics.

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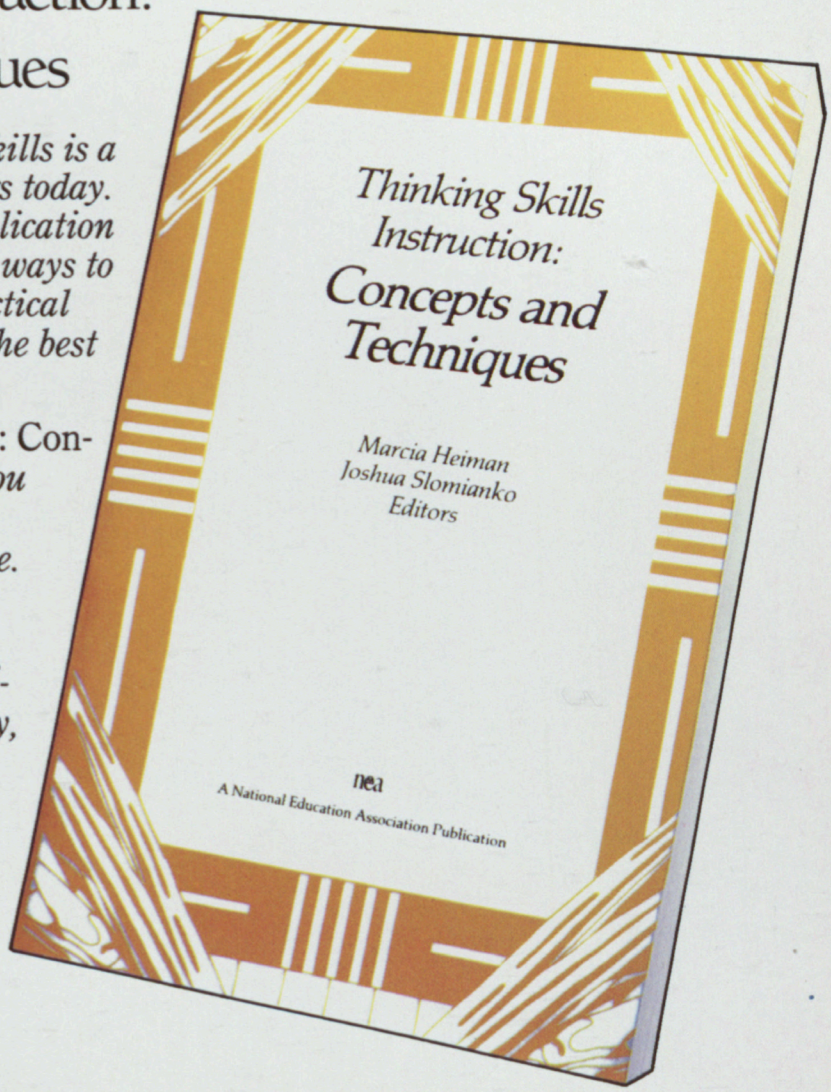

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